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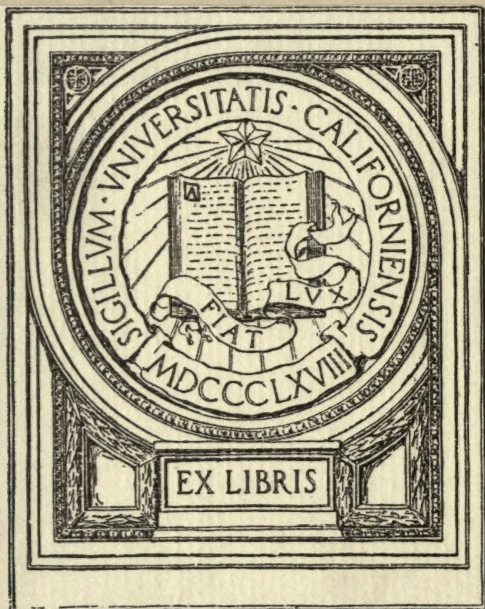
THE ASCENT OF CALVARY

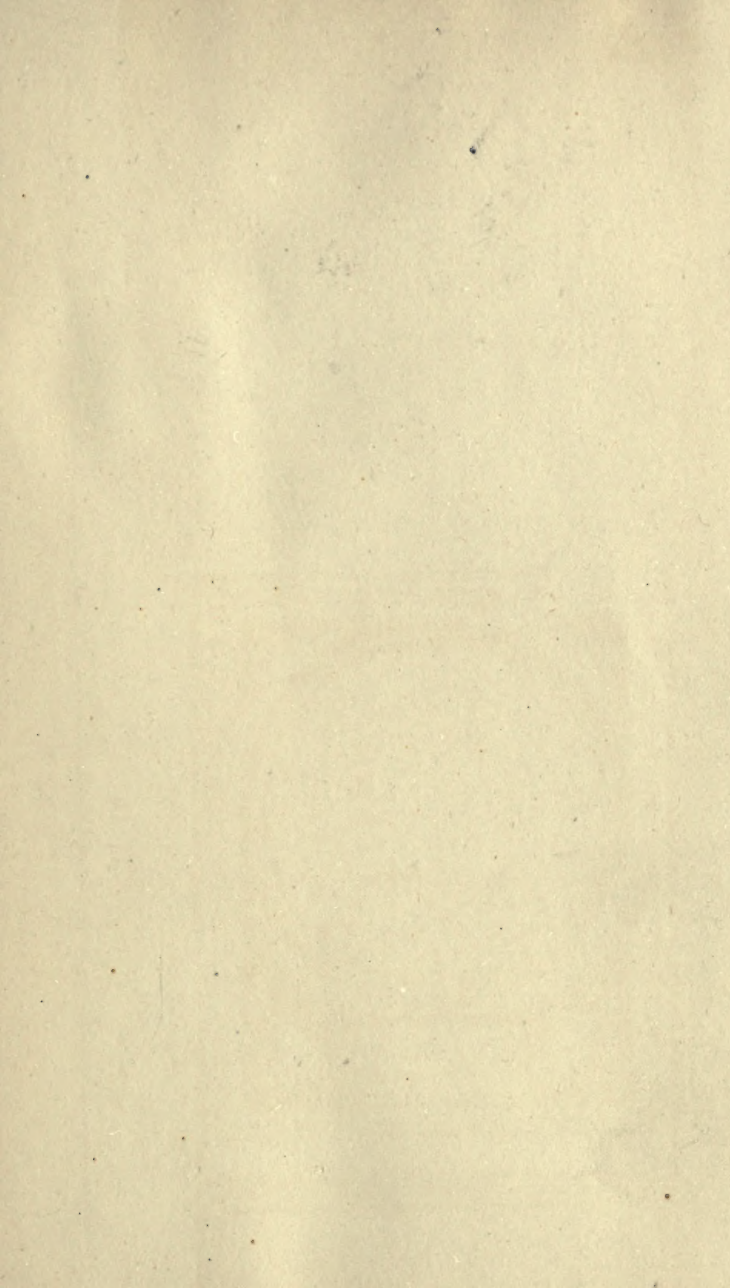
PÈRE LOUIS PERROY



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THE
ASCENT OF CALVARY

The Ascent of Calvary

BY

Père Louis Perroy

Authorized Translation from the French by
MARIAN LINDSAY

With Introduction by
MOST REV. JOHN J. GLENNON, D.D.
Archbishop of St. Louis



New York

P. J. Kenedy & Sons

Publishers to the Holy Apostolic See

1922

BT 430
74

Nihil Obstat:

ARTHURUS J. SCANLAN, S.T.D.
Censor Librorum

Imprimatur:

✠ PATRITIUS J. HAYES, D.D.
Archiepiscopus Neo-Eboracensis

PHILAN

NEO-EBORACI
die 6, Januarii 1922

P. LETHIELLEUX
10 RUE CASSETTE, PARIS
PUBLISHERS OF THE ORIGINAL

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PRINTED IN U. S. A.

Introduction

THE tragedy of the Cross is the greatest tragedy in the history of the world. It stands alone in its personnel, scope, and purpose. No other may compare with it. The human and the divine in the person of the great Victim mingle equally in its composition. Just as its scope is seen to range from eternity to eternity, its high purpose includes the vindication and satisfaction of divine justice—the undoing of world sin and the restoration of fallen man to his long lost heritage.

The clouds that hung on the brow of Calvary darkened the universe, obscuring even from the divine Christ the vision of the heavenly Father. When the loved Master hanging on the Cross spoke the words which concluded the tragedy, “*Consummatum est*,” there was accomplished a work *infinite* in character and value, because it was the

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deed of the Infinite God. It was an act of supremest mercy, and of love so potent as to empty the Divine Heart of its treasures.

All the race that had gone before looked forward to the great tragedy; and all of us since then turn to it as our only hope. The Cross lifted on Calvary divides the ages, and stands and shall stand for all time on the highest point of the great divide. Men that struggle upwards toward it are struggling toward the Light. Indeed, since that flaming symbol was lifted by the sacrifice and love of Christ, all progress must by it be measured, and all truth tested, as by it, also, all men and all men's lives shall be judged.

In these later days, stained as they are by tears and blood, we have seen the peoples in the hours of trial, turn yearningly toward the Crucified One, and then, as their petty triumphs came, turn fitfully away, until just today the only place of honor reserved for the Cross, and its only value to the living is to mark the resting-place of their sol-

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dier dead. We who would stand by the Cross, we who revere and worship Him who died thereon, have the task and the duty to bring back, to set up anew, the precious symbol; to lift it high above the crowns of kings, the ambitions of statesmen, the greed of nations, and the hearts of men.

In the following pages so admirably translated, is told again the story of how step by step the Saviour bore His Cross and went to death. There is beauty, feeling, and eloquence in the telling. Scene after scene is etched by a master-hand, with its background from the Old Testament, and in the foreground surrounding the precious Victim are found all the incidents of the Gospel narrative as they developed on the way—the kiss of betrayal—the cries of blasphemy—the reed and the scourge—the thorn crown and the soldier's lance. Then the Mother, who loves and stands to see her Son die—the faithful few and faithless many; and then at last, the lonely, blood-stained figure hanging

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between earth and heaven, yielding His spirit up to God.

You will have, gentle reader, an opportunity in the unfolding of each page to study, to meditate, and to pray. The blessed, bleeding Christ is looking out at you from every chapter. You can walk with Him along the way. You can help Him bear His Cross; and with a heart filled with sympathy you can watch and wait in the shadow of the Cross, the coming of the dawn.

✠JOHN J. GLENNON
Archbishop of St. Louis.

ST. LOUIS, MO.
March 16, 1921.

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THE
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1844

1845

1846

1847

The Ascent of Calvary

"My death gives you life"

—Inscription engraved beneath
the great Crucifix in the Cathedral of Ancona.

OUTSIDE the city of Jerusalem, to the northwest, and close to the walls, there rise, facing each other, two rocky mounds about twenty-five feet in height, and between them stretches a narrow valley wherein are gardens in which olive and fig trees abound. The mound nearest the ramparts is bare and wild, terminating in a knoll of cranium-like shape. It is the place of public execution—the property of the city—and is called Calvary.

Across the valley, directly opposite to Calvary, in the side of the other mound that rises out of the gardens and orchards, a tomb is hewn from the solid rock. As was the custom in those days, the tomb was laid out with an atrium,

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at the far end of which a low opening led into a small chamber, where a large stone slab ran across the full width and occupied half the space of the vault. Upon the slab was laid the dead body, covered with sweet spices, and swathed in linen. This tomb, as well as the surrounding gardens, belonged to a certain Joseph of Arimathea.

In the narrow valley and its setting of luxuriant gardens in proximity to the walls of Jerusalem and its Judgment Gate, on the bare and wind-swept Calvary and in the tomb cut in the rock, there came to pass, in the space of three days, the two most stupendous events in human history—the death and the resurrection of Christ.

The closing episodes of Our Saviour's life were enacted on these two sacred hills.

From eternity God, whose all-comprehensive providence embraces detail as well as the harmonious whole, had prepared the stage for the glorious and sanguinary drama. The two rocky knolls had long been chosen as the

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blessed spot where, by virtue of the blood that would inundate the one, and the glory that would illumine the other, He would forget man's long record of iniquity and the fatal consequences of Adam's fall.

In Our Lord's wanderings with His disciples around the city and across the plains, He must often have passed near the forbidding and desolate rock of Golgotha. With what emotion He must have gazed on it, as He said to His Apostles, "I say to you, that all that the Prophets have foretold is about to be accomplished. The Son of man shall be betrayed, delivered unto the Gentiles, spit upon, scourged, and crucified." With a far-off look fixed on Calvary He added: "But He will rise on the third day." Through the pale green, interlaced branches of the olive trees He discerned the tomb, the stone of the sepulchre victoriously rolled back, and Himself, glorious and triumphant over death, coming forth into the mist and saffron light of the Easter dawn.

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Through the Cross He had attained to glory.

Calvary, then, would be for Jesus the culminating point of His mortal life. He was born to ascend Golgotha, and to ascend it as a victim; for was He not first and above all, the Victim of Expiation? He knew this, He felt it in every fiber of His being, He had willed it, and His heavenly Father so regarded Him. The foremost reason for Christ's earthly existence, His chief rôle, was to satisfy the justice of God, to repair the outrage offered to God, to cherish God's honor. It would seem, almost, as though the salvation of mankind came second. To satisfy God's perfect justice, Jesus must pay the full debt, and receive no mercy.

For more than four thousand years this supreme expiation was being prepared. As great storms gather slowly, heralded by threatening clouds, flashes of lightning and distant rumblings of thunder, so the divine wrath had accumulated from century to century against sinful humanity.

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Now and then through the ages God's finger moved, sketching, in rough, broad strokes an outline of His anger, to be filled in, in the course of time. There were tragic and sanguinary expiatory offerings in the animal kingdom: the lamb that was sacrificed daily in the Temple; the red heifer immolated for the people on the Mount of Olives opposite the Temple; the scapegoat, crowned with a crimson fillet, chased into the desert and across the valley of Cedron, bearing upon itself the iniquities of all.

At times God's avenging hand was laid upon man. Isaac, the only and beloved son upon whom was centered all his father's hopes, was taken up to a mountain not far distant from Calvary, the rock of Moria, where the Temple was to be built. The boy carried on his back the wood for the sacrifice, and his own father was to immolate him! What picture more tragic!

Again there is Job fallen from riches and honor to the misery of a dung heap near the gate of the city. There is Jonas

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thrown into the sea, got rid of as a burden that drew down the wrath of God. In all these tragic figures and happenings there are outcries and lamentations that betray the weight of the Almighty's anger. " . . . : for he is accursed of God that hangeth on a tree:" (Deut. 21 : 23). "We have thought him as it were a leper," cries Isaias, "and as one struck by God and afflicted." (Is. 53 : 4.) Now at last the time is accomplished: the real victim promised through the ages, has come. Christ is born, and it is with jealous care that God guards Him until He ascends Calvary to pour forth His blood.

There is, first, the remote preparation, a slow gathering, as it were, of an outraged justice. Jesus is born; His crib a manger, an icy grotto at midnight, His first roof; then exile, persecution, obscurity, followed by the sweat of toil to earn His daily bread in the labor of the carpenter shop, and finally the exhausting work of the apostolate. All, all are instruments of vengeance in the hands of God; the dust

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of the highway, the tempests of the lakes, hunger and thirst, the forty days' fast in the desert, His fatigue at Jacob's Well.

There were striking miracles, too, but they are the flowers with which God crowns His Victim. Then the final triumph, when this Victim is led in triumphal procession from Bethphage to Jerusalem, and through the Golden Gate, the cries of "Hosanna to the Son of David!" resounding. But behind the palm branches, the delirium and the shouts of joy, the stage is set for the ignominious drama, and another cortege that will before long wend its way up Calvary.

The instruments of torture are ready: from the more refined—Herod, Caiphas and Pilate, to the coarser ones—the rough hireling, the soldiers that spat upon Him. Tortures of the heart are not lacking, nor degraded honor. A human being is trampled upon, and no humiliation or suffering is spared Him. All creatures seem to have been sum-

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moned to lend a hand, each at its appointed time.

And now the last, the toiling up Golgotha, where, on the summit, the gentle, blood-stained face of Our Lord lifts supplicating eyes on high, as He whispers that sublime prayer, "Father, forgive them"

O God, forgive them! Here you have the whole drama of the Passion.

I WILL follow Thee, my Jesus, step by step, walking in Thy bloody footprints even to Calvary's summit. Let me touch each one of the instruments of torture, let me weigh the agony that pierced Thy Sacred Heart, knowing that at the end of this Via Crucis I shall see my Saviour, and shall carry away the imprint of His countenance upon my soul. Marked with this divine seal, my life will be changed. No longer shall I be a slave to the vain things of earth, but I shall rise above them to Calvary, where Thy dying eyes sought and found the satisfied Justice of the Father.

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My God, look first upon the face of
Our Lord, Thy Christ. Then cast
Thine eyes on me below, and have
pity. Amen.

FIRST PART

The Instruments of Torture



I

The Cords that Bind His Freedom

OF all the hard moments in life, that in which one is about to lose his liberty is, perhaps, the most painful.

Jesus had risen several times from the dark grotto where He had suffered and wept, and where He had been bathed in a bloody sweat. The darkness of night enveloped Him. The ingratitude and indifference of the sleeping Apostles oppressed His heart; terror of the torments to be endured was upon Him. He had gone to His Apostles, seeking consolation and human companionship in His desolation, but He found them silent, benumbed with sleep. He returned to suffer and to pray. A few moments more and His body and hands would be bound, His neck encircled with a rope, His freedom lost. Mid-

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night approached. Across the brook of Cedron He discerned the lights of an approaching procession, the confused waving of torches, while as yet the calm of death rested upon the slope of Mount Moria, and hovered over the narrow bed of the Cedron.

An order for perfect silence had been given, a precaution inspired by the hope of taking the Master and His Apostles by surprise. The Apostles slept while the Master trembled at what was about to come upon Him, and the whole sinister setting contributed to His terror and dismay. In the chill of night the full moon cast long-drawn shadows of the pale olive trees at the end of the valley, on the great walls of the Temple, and the tiers of the sanctuary. Immersed in dolorous gloom, Jesus was alone, seemingly bereft of strength and of will-power, as one paralyzed.

And yet, had He wished, He could have saved Himself. There were no habitations on this slope, only a thicket of olive-trees. Bethphage was not far

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off; a short and rapid climb up the mountain and behind it, to the right, lay Bethany, the home of friends who watched and waited. The house stood above the village. He knew a secret entrance, and could slip in unperceived. From there it would have been easy for Him to descend by the Jericho road which passed to the left of a deep gorge where flowed the Cedron. There He could hide. The wild grottoes above Jericho where He had fasted and prayed for forty days, as well as the mounts of Moab, would have afforded refuge. He had only to cross the deserted plain and the Jordan, and He was safe.

Yes, but would He have saved the world?

It is not presuming too much to suppose that all these human considerations crowded into the mind of the Man prostrated by the vision of approaching death, and still free to escape under cover of the night. His safety was in His own hands: those hands that were soon to be brutally seized and fastened behind Him, those wrists that

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were to be bound with cords tightened until they sank into the flesh, taking from Him all freedom, all power to move.

“Father, if it be possible”
In the secret anguish of His soul, Jesus longed not to be bound; willing to go to death if need be, but with head up; not dragged, not violated, not humiliated! “Father, if it be possible”

But it was not possible. The heavens were as brass, and nothing was granted to Jesus from above, where no eye save that of an angry God and the remote and terrified gaze of the angels rested upon the Redeemer. There is no hope, beloved Saviour! Extend Thy hands to be bound, and surrender!

The mob fell upon Jesus, securing Him with a network of cords drawn closely about His sacred person. He offered no resistance. Why should He? Had He not manifested His power by felling with a glance the approaching soldiers? Let that suffice. But why bind Him so tightly? He makes no

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effort to free Himself. "This is your hour and the hour of the powers of darkness. It is no longer Mine, My divine light is extinguished."

Jesus was led forth, betrayed by Judas' kiss, deserted by His Apostles, abandoned by all, His hands tied, a rope around His neck, His body encircled with cords. Later they freed His neck and body but the hands remained bound. When they buffeted Him, He was unable to ward off the blows, to wipe from His face the sweat, the dust, the spittle, the dirty water and dregs of wine flung at Him.

O JESUS, I kiss Thy poor, swollen, lacerated hands! Would that I could avert the blows! Alas! I forget that I, too, have often struck and wounded Thee most grievously. In the Eucharist Thou art still bound and bound Thou dost remain among men, a Prisoner of Love, subject to insults, enduring forgetfulness and neglect. For Thee, in Thy Holy Sacrament, it will ever be the hour of impenetrable darkness.

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Those who worship Jesus bound, bind themselves for love of Him. To be bound publicly, to surrender liberty, man's dearest possession, this is the very essence of the vow of obedience—and yet the vow of obedience is neither servitude nor slavery. It is a bond of love between two hearts; a bond one wishes ever to render indissoluble, beyond betrayal. It is a poem of intimate and mysterious sweetness.

Beloved Saviour, I desire to love Thee, and to so attach myself to Thee that no earthly force or allurements can separate me from Thy love!

Three things there are, here below, capable of taking us away from God:

The goods of this world—I choose poverty.

The indulgence of the flesh—I will be chaste in mind and body.

And lastly, my own will—I will obey!

Thus, bound by their vows and rules, Religious go through life buffeted, persecuted, rejected by the world, and finally, like Jesus, dragged up to Cal-

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vary. Never let us loosen one of these bonds, for love of that Figure in the Pretorium, who marched before us in His divine humility, bereft of liberty and power. He will have His day and His hour, when His chains shall be burst asunder!

Oh, terrible liberty of an avenging God!

II

The Stones of the Brook of Cedron

THE soldiers, with Jesus in their midst, hurried in disorder from the garden. They were not sure of their capture, and hastened their withdrawal by a short path which was cut in the rock, and intercepted the Cedron below the bridge and the high road.

“Their feet are swift to shed blood,” says the Holy Spirit. (Ps. 13 : 3.) A soul in the grip of passion rushes head-long to enjoy, to possess, to see, and to touch. This haste to satisfy a passion, be it what it may: avarice, thirst for blood, or voluptuousness, betrays man’s weakness. Instantly he must seize the fleeting moment of sinful pleasure, or it passes him by. In his impulse, self-control is lost, and he becomes a blind slave, driven on by the stinging whips of evil desires.

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JESUS was led forth tightly bound, dragged hither and thither at the whim of His captors. In descending the steps cut in the path, He stumbled and fell. Disorder, cries, and confusion followed. Those in front slackened their pace; those in the rear were precipitated upon the fallen body of Jesus. His head struck against the rock, which yielded not to soften the fall of its Maker. But wait. On Ascension Day the insensible rock will give under the pressure of those glorified feet, and the imprint will remain to the end of time to be kissed with reverence and love as the last human trace of the Saviour. But on the night before Christ's Passion, nature pursued her orderly course, indifferent to the Victim bearing the sins of the world.

Man must learn here below to support with equanimity the indifference of animate and inanimate objects. Why should he complain? What consideration has he merited, and by what right does he ask exemption

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from the law of nature? Heat, cold, wind, rain, all in turn annoy and inconvenience him. In our impatience with the suffering inseparable from such things, there lies a secret pride. We seek privilege, we desire to be the exception; our will would be supreme, however much others may be subject to the common law.

God performed no miracles for His Son when He entered upon His Passion. Jesus fell upon the rock, and was bruised like any other man of flesh and blood. He lay there prostrate, powerless to help Himself. He accepted assistance to rise to His feet as He had accepted the blows.

All these happenings were a part of God's great plan; touch or alter it He would not. They were merely so many instruments in the hands of an angry God. The terror and loathing which produced the bloody sweat, the silent and indifferent grotto, moist with the blood that trickled to the ground, the stones of the brook, the soldiers who spat upon Him and blasphemed, the

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lash of the whip, the nails of the
Cross. . . .

O Justice of God!

III

The Buffeting Hands of Hirelings

WHY should a blow in the face so outrage a man's sense of honor? Because the face is the noblest part of man. Life and love are expressed in its lineaments, it reflects the soul, it turns upward to heaven. The physical pain is a secondary thing—the blow is, rather, a moral affront that gives rise to rage and shame, that dishonors and humiliates one not only in his own eyes, but in the eyes of others. To be struck by an inferior is the ultimate expression of insult and indignity, and is as a burning wound to one's pride.

Jesus had appeared before the high priest, who, by subtle methods of questioning, endeavored to entrap Him. Soldiers and servants crowded around Him—a low rabble, flatterers, and time-

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servers, athirst for gain. And they had a private grudge to settle. That glance of Jesus, which had cast them to the ground, the ignominy of that humiliation in the garden must be avenged. One of the soldiers struck the first blow, masking his rancor under the guise of zeal in obeying the commands of the high priest—a zeal fraught with no danger, since Jesus could neither return the blow nor ward it off. The soldier saw his chance to curry favor with his master and the presiding council.

On the road of sorrow and disillusion, when misfortunes follow in rapid succession, and certain milestones are once passed, return to the old happiness is forever barred. There is no going back: the way leads ever on to deeper humiliation and pain. Louis XVI, pursued by the scum of the people, driven into the embrasure of a window in the Tuileries and there forced to don a red cap, mount a table, and drink a draught of wine to satisfy the grotesque caprice of the mad populace, lost in

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that moment his royal prestige as king and protector. From such a dethronement there is no return to glory.

Thus the buffeting shattered Christ's prestige in the eyes of the crowd. The soldiers whom He had flung to earth in the garden, assured now that no more 'magic' would be practised and no return made to their outrages, assumed an overbearing attitude. Their capers aroused such mirth and applause that their comrades, warming themselves in the atrium, hurried in to witness the fun, just as the first resounding blow had been struck.¹

The blood rushed to the face of Jesus. This blow marked the beginning of His Passion. Accepting it in silence, He submitted in silence to the long series of indignities that followed upon it.

Ever since that fatal night, Christ is struck each time those in authority

¹ In the midst of the ruins of what was once the house of Annas there stands, in the court, a gnarled olive tree, to the trunk of which Jesus was bound. And on the spot where, tradition tells us, Jesus was struck by the soldier of the high priest, a lamp burns night and day.

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uphold laws in opposition to the teaching of His Church. "Why these narrow dogmas?" is the cry. "Why submit to an intolerant Church? Caesar's rights are supreme!" And when His Spirit is scoffed at, and excluded from our daily lives and from society at large, when we revolt against certain commandments and commit shameful acts, we buffet Christ before His angels and saints. Again it is secret pride that demands personal liberty and free indulgence in pleasure: "Hast Thou given me freedom of action but to set limits to it?" 'Tis the old cry of Lucifer, "I will not serve!"

And there are certain cruel preferences that are like a blow. First the high priest was preferred to Christ; a few hours later it would be Barabbas—a second blow. So all that disparages Christ and His cause are as blows struck at the Redeemer.

OH, Jesus! I accept in remembrance of Thy cruel buffeting all that could

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humiliate me in public or in private,
and especially do I accept humiliations
that come from my inferiors.

IV

Spittle and the Dregs of Wine

CHRIST'S condemnation in Herod's court, for blasphemy, was the signal to lower all barriers of restraint. The high priest descended hastily from the raised platform and rent his garments. The other judges, seated in a semi-circle around him on the floor, arose from their cushions. The two secretaries, occupied in taking depositions for and against the Accused, threw down their tablets, and with one voice the words, "He has blasphemed; He is worthy of death!" rang through the atrium. That cry was the signal. A rush was made for Jesus. The judges and superior officers, vying with the servants, spat at and derided Him. The servants and soldiers, armed, as was customary, with cords and whips, were stationed in the judgment-hall, where they awaited the signal to strike

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the Prisoner. And at those words, "He has blasphemed," a mob was let loose.

Morning approached. Jesus, bound, was dragged into a corner in the guard-house where gathered the servants and soldiers. Through their disordered midst He was driven, an object of derision, struck at from all sides as He passed.

The Sanhedrin, after the banal interchange of polite expressions then in usage, retired for the night, only to assemble again at daybreak to hold a second council. Jesus, in the meantime, alone and unprotected, was handed over to the soldiers, vulgar men uncouth in speech, brutal in gesture, flushed with drink. They had two hours before them to deal, according to their whim, with this Prisoner, condemned by the law and fallen from His high estate. A smouldering hatred rankled in the breasts of these underlings. Only the heart and the eye of love are able to comprehend the lengths to which miscreants of this caliber can

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go in outraging the gentle Saviour, and in wreaking their vengeance upon Him.

“Let us,” they said, “examine him by outrages and tortures.” (Wis. 2 : 19.) He proclaims Himself the Son of God. Now we shall see if He speaks the truth. Christ had been condemned for sacrilege and blasphemy by the highest moral authority. The priests and judges who gave at least the appearance of legality, were no longer present, and the soldiers had a free hand. Had these soldiers all been Jews, that fact would have sufficed to explain these outrages. And Jesus being a vanquished Jew, it is not strange that Romans should take part, for Rome was not moved to compassion save from motives of expediency.

The guards, whether Jews or Romans, were weary of their prolonged hours of duty and vented their spleen in cries, jeers and a torrent of blows. “They strike him and say many things against him, blaspheming,” says St. Luke. They taunted Him with the title of prophet, and in the hour of His weak-

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ness they belittled His power with the name of magic. The prophets foretold greater degradation than that recorded in the words of St. Luke. Job exclaimed, "They have rushed in upon me, as when a wall is broken, and a gate is opened, and have rolled themselves down to my miseries. . . . I am compared to dirt and am likened to embers and ashes." (Job 30 : 14, 19.)

In what more striking words could His sufferings be expressed? Isaias declared: "I have given my body to the strikers, and my cheeks to them that pluck them: I have not turned my face from them that rebuked me, and spit upon me. (Is. 50 : 6.) I looked about and there was none to help: I sought and there was none to give aid:" (Is. 63 : 5.) What appalling solitude in the midst of His enemies!

"I am become like to a pelican of the wilderness: I am like a night raven in the house. I have watched . . . all alone." (Ps. 101 : 7, 8.) And finally, "I shall be satiated with opprobrium." To fulfil these prophecies Christ must

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sound the depths of ignominy and humiliation in the midst of this drunken rabble. "Those in wine scoffed at me and tormented me in derision, composing songs to disparage me," and again, "Now I am turned into their song, and am become their byword." (Job 30 : 9.)

V

The Bandage that Blinds
His Eyes

TWO things, however, disturbed and exasperated His tormentors,—the steady gaze of those eyes; His silence and submission. This demeanor troubled and annoyed them; they would have preferred murmurings or cries of pain to show they had achieved their object.

One of the torturers, gifted with a more inventive mind, proposed to cover those disquieting eyes, to make a derisive jest of the Saviour's gift of prophecy. The guards had gathered to take part in the amusement, and in the intervals between the buffeting and spitting—for it is written, "They ceased not to spit in my face,"—in the midst of the throwing of dice, and the drinking of wine, they diverted themselves in this wise.

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"Now tell us, Christ, the Messias, Son of God and great Prophet, who has struck Thee?" and a ringing blow fell upon His countenance. "And this man here before Thee, who is he?" Then from behind another blow smote that face "set as a most hard rock." (Isa. 50 : 7.) "Come now! Tell us his name, his age, his country; speak!"

The thin cloth binding the eyes drooped and veiled a portion of the visage. Even with the eyes hidden, that erect head was exasperating. Blows and blasphemies were rained upon the Victim until the executioners stopped at last, wearied and surfeited. Nothing is sadder or more revolting than the exhaustion that follows upon the satiation of brutal passion.

THERE exist two celebrated paintings of that tragic night. In one the Divine Majesty is pictured under a torrent of blows, outraged and spat upon. In the other, all that is indecorous and malicious in human nature is exposed in its

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hideous crudity. In the first, a fresco by Fra Angelico, in the convent of St. Mark in Florence, Christ is seated upon a throne in the attitude of a king, the folds of His garment falling away gracefully on either side. The pose is calm and imbued with the serenity of a superior being. In one hand He holds a reed for a scepter, in the other a globe. All about Him are coarse faces saluting Him ironically, sensual mouths in the act of spitting, hands lifted to deal blows; a menacing fist is flourished in His face, a hand armed with a stick is about to strike. Calm and unmoved, Jesus submits to all these indignities. His mouth is sad, His eyes are bound, but the thin covering does not completely hide the resignation of those closed lids. And yet so great an air of majesty emanates from this despised Being, that one falls on one's knees in adoring contemplation.

Let us reflect a moment on the gentle face, and the bound eyes; seeking in this bandaging the intentions of men and the lesson God would teach us.

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Fear as well as derision caused men to blindfold Christ. They feared, in perpetrating their vulgar indignities, to meet the gaze of their Victim, for the eye of the Master was the eye of God. Bound hands and blinded eyes leave Him a helpless plaything at the mercy of His captors. In this picture God would disclose to us the refuge which the human soul can find, when, after the manner of Christ, it takes shelter from mockery and affront by retiring into the spiritual depths of its nature, shutting away the storm that rages without.

But though He appears to have hidden himself in this profound silence, it is only for a time: the hour of action will come. "I shall have My day and My hour—for Me and all My elect who now seem oppressed by this silence from on high." "Behold the Son of man to-day, struck in the face by hirelings and scorned by judges; then you who strike and spit upon Him shall see Him resplendent in His majesty at the right hand of God. God Himself! "That day

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is a day of wrath, . . . a day of calamity and misery" (Sophon. 1 : 15).

"On that day I shall act," He tells us through the voice of His prophets. Now He is passive. "In that day I shall finish My work." Hence nothing is yet finished. "On that day I shall display My mercy and My justice." Hence these attributes are now in abeyance! "On that day the just will be My possession." Safe in the hands of God—what better refuge? And the persecutors, the executioners, the impious, what of them? "I shall devour them as fire consumes dry stubble."

On that day you shall look back, O sinners, and shall see from afar My happiness and the happiness of My elect. "And you shall return, and shall see the difference between the just and the wicked: and between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." (Mal. 3 : 18). I wait, O Lord, believing that I shall one day see the splendor of Thy goodness in that land where death is no more! "I believe to

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see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living." (Ps. 26 : 13).

THE second painting, portraying the cruelty and disrespect of men, is a scene from the brush of Poussin.

In a low room, lighted by torches, soldiers are drinking, laughing, gambling, singing ribald songs. Hatred and impurity, traits violent and bestial, wear the same visage, destroying the likeness of God in His creature. Jesus, His hands tied behind His back, is seated in a corner, posed in profile. His body is in a painfully bent position, the head draped with a filthy rag. Servants and hangers-on amuse themselves with their Victim, while the soldiers, tired of this pastime, are gambling. A cruel blow has just been dealt the Master, and the room resounds with coarse guffaws and loud applause. One bends indecently before Christ, his grinning, sneering face looking over his shoulder as if he would say: "Now, who is before Thee?" Through the cloth that covers His countenance, in the whole

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attitude of the Master, in the tears which stream down His cheek, one divines His suffering and resignation and the crushing of His human Heart.

Oh, veiled head of Jesus! Oh, mockery, indecency, and cowardly derision, ye are the consolation of the oppressed! Behind the veil Jesus knows all, sees all, judges all.

“The eyes of the Lord are upon the just: and his ears unto their prayers” (Ps. 33 : 16). Behind Thy veil, “remember me, O my God, unto good. Amen” (2 Esd. 13 : 31).

VI

The White Robe

WHEN morning came, Jesus was dragged from Pilate to Herod, and in what a pitiful condition!

During the last part of the night He had reached the nadir of suffering and humiliation. The low room from which He emerged, the pillar, the olive tree in the court of Caiphas to which He was bound while the soldiers fortified themselves with wine, and took breath in order to put renewed vigor into their work—all these are so many witnesses of His terrible agony.

From Pilate's court He was driven through the streets. His garments were soiled, His face swollen and bruised from blows, His beard matted with dust and spittle. Men turned away at the sight of Him, the Prophet tells us. It was a repugnant face, not sufficiently blood-stained to excite pity, yet filthy

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and disfigured enough to awaken a feeling of disgust. My God, pardon this description, but it is true, and one dare not change what has been said by the Holy Spirit. His arms were bound, and on that divine cheek from which He could not wipe the tears, one perceived through the dirt and disfigurement, the blush of shame. Jesus, we are told, wept often during the Passion. Now He stood before Herod. That voluptuous and blasé man had long desired to see the Wonder-Worker, and had assembled his court early in the morning, as guests are bidden to witness the tricks of some celebrated sleight-of-hand performer. And as Christ stood there, pale, bedraggled and exhausted, a shiver of disgust ran through that elegant assembly. 'Why have the guards not changed His clothes or at least cleaned Him?' was the query written on their dissolute faces.

Jesus was questioned, flattered, praised, and caressed in turn. Through it all He remained silent. They untied His hands, that He might perform His

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tricks, but His arms fell lifeless, and no word escaped His lips. They insisted, beginning to manifest signs of impatience.

“Why, think you, have I risen so early and disarranged my day and assembled my court, but to witness your exploits and to hear what you have to say?”

Still Jesus stood mute.

“Who is this stupid fool, ignorant of the amenities and usages of society, that Pilate has sent to me?”

“Your rival, O Herod, for He calls Himself ‘King of the Jews!’ ”

“A handsome king in truth! We shall clothe him in royal robes, for I promised my court an entertainment, and since he refuses to amuse us, we shall amuse ourselves.”

The white robe, the garment of contempt, was brought forth and put on Jesus; but He stood unmoved, His attitude disdainful of the world personified in Herod. This explained His silence. Had He before Him a sinner, oh! then His Heart would have melted, and His

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hands would have sought him in the dust to uplift him; but before one who mocked, Jesus was silent, biding His time. "I also will laugh in your destruction and will mock when that shall come to you which you feared" (Prov. 1 : 26). I, Infinite Wisdom, whom you treat as a fool, I in My time, will deride and make sport of you!

What grim sport!

THERE are white garments still in the world and ever will be as long as the world is what it is. Those who are willing to sacrifice something for love of God wear a portion of His robe. To love God above all things, means to be clothed, according to the world, in the garment of a fool. There is, however, still another garment, that of humility, donned with the thought of my sins that envelop me, the temptations that encompass me, the revolt of my senses, my falls, perhaps. This mantle of humility is all I have to offer God, having lost my first robe, the garment of my innocence.

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My Lord and my God, deign to order
that my robe be brought to me, and
with it the ring and the sandals and
Thy love, to be mine once more! Amen.

VII

The Whips and Scourges

FROM the beginning of His life unto the end, Jesus had ever before His eyes His bloody Passion—like an artist who, through all suffering and sacrifice, holds fast to the ideal from which he fashions his masterpiece.

The Great Drama had five principal acts which Jesus enumerated in detail, and to which He had often referred in intimate converse with His disciples. More than once, with a touch of sadness, He had said to them: "The Son of man shall be betrayed, but woe to him who betrays Him. He shall be delivered to the Princes of the Priests and to the Ancients, who in turn will deliver Him to the Gentiles." This is the first act.

He will be mocked and derided, He will be made the sport of tormentors

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who will vent their spleen upon Him. In these words, as in a mirror where distant scenes are reflected, Jesus reviewed all the outrages that were to be perpetrated by Herod's bodyguard in the Pretorium, even to the sinister ridicule of the mock coronation, and the royal title nailed at the head of the cross. This is the second act.

One sentence describes the third act: "He was spat upon." Christ shudders at the thought of it.

He is scourged, beaten as a slave, an evil animal. Act the fourth.

Following upon all these scenes of cruelty and orgies of blood, we come to the fifth and last act of the drama, with Calvary for its setting.

Here we have an abridgment of the whole Passion of Christ as it occupied His thoughts and anguished His soul during His mortal life. The betrayal, the mocking, the spitting, the buffeting, the cross, are the summits He must climb in less than eighteen hours. But what depths of humiliation He was to pass through before reaching

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the great culmination of the Crucifixion!

They scourged Him. A superfluous cruelty, the scourging, this inflicting of unnecessary torture on one about to die. Scourging as a chastisement destined to punish or teach a salutary lesson was within the law, but when administered to a man condemned to death, it was an act of savagery.

Jesus was subjected to it, and not to the honor of humanity be it said; for of all punishments, this lashing of human flesh affords the keenest satisfaction to those who inflict it, satisfying the lowest appetites that slumber in the depths of degenerate man.

The Jews, knowing this evil tendency, had a law ratified by God which limited scourging to thirty-nine strokes, and restricted them to the breast and shoulders. In order, however, that Jesus might not benefit by this law, He was handed over to the Gentiles, barbarous and cynical, who punished without mercy, despite their civilization.

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O Jesus! Thou wert stripped naked and bound to a pillar; Thine arms were stretched forward and tied to a ring; Thy poor body was bent double to receive the stripes upon Thy back. I have seen and kissed this pillar in the church of St. Praxedes in Rome, and thought with emotion of the blood Thou didst shed there for me!

No evidence exists of how long the scourging lasted; all we know is that it was inflicted by the Gentiles, for whom no law limited the number of strokes, that the Gentiles were incited by the Jews, that the Man delivered into their hands, covered with dirt and filth, had lost all title to consideration and was held to be a fool, a seducer, an agitator, unworthy of pity.

Pilate's sentence condemned the criminal to a severe flogging; and the Gentiles, not to fall behind the outrages of the previous night, gave free hand to the coarse, sensual soldiers, who thirsted to satisfy their basest instincts.

We know also, that switches were

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not used for strangers and slaves, but "knotted whips bristling with spikes" (Bourdaloue); and, without drawing upon the imagination, we may have a vivid picture of what Christ suffered at the hands of those inhuman monsters who, not satisfied with belaboring Him, tied Him to a pillar and lashed Him until His whole body was furrowed with blows from head to foot and streaming with blood.

We are given an idea of how brutal was the torture inflicted, by the words, "The Divine Lamb, bleeding and moaning under the stripes"; "The wicked have wrought upon my back: they have lengthened their iniquity." (Ps. 128 : 3). "I have given my body to the strikers and my cheeks to them that plucked them: I have not turned away my face from them that rebuked me, and spit upon me." (Isa. 50 : 6).

What more vivid description of this long and cruel flagellation? Not one of the agonies endured by Our Lord in His Passion but could answer to this graphic account, and now the inspired

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pen of the Prophet Isaias gives the last touch to the sinister picture.

“ . . . there is no beauty in him, nor comeliness: and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of him: Despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity: and his look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed Him not . . . we have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted” (Isa. 53 : 2-4).

This wealth of detail agrees strikingly with Christ's condition after the scourging. Why did God will it to be so cruel, so revolting? Why this poignant and realistic picture drawn by the prophet, constituting in itself one act of the sanguinary drama, the thought of which caused Jesus to shudder when but the vision of it arose before His eyes? Those who have sounded the awful mystery of depraved humanity, and the perversion of the flesh designed by God to be the radiant envelope for a

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pure soul, can perhaps understand the horror of divine expiation.

In the Old Testament, God, in His abomination of the sins of the flesh, flashed forth from heaven a fire that descended one silent night upon Sodom and Gomorrha, igniting those accursed cities like two torches, until every creature and thing in them was consumed, as formerly the Almighty had opened the fountains of the deeps and submerged a corrupt world.

This same corruption disfigures God's work to-day, and but for the precious blood that flowed at the pillar, the anger of God would have fallen upon the world and desolated the face of the earth.

VIII

The Crown of Thorns

JESUS spoke several times during His Passion, and on two occasions the meaning of His words was too clear to admit of a shadow of doubt in the minds of His hearers. To the high priest who summoned Him to declare if He were the Son of God, the Blessed Christ, the expected Messias, He replied: "Thou hast said it."

To Pilate, who, visibly troubled, asked: "Art thou in truth a king?", Jesus answered, "Thou speaketh truly; I am a king." Thus Christ publicly proclaimed Himself God and King—and He will die for these truths.

These two affirmations, this double character of God and King affirmed so clearly by Christ before His judges, was made the object of all the mockery and derision in the drama of the Passion. The people, seizing upon this declara-

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tion, mocked Him on Calvary. "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." The high priests sneeringly called to Him: "Vah, thou that destroyeth the temple of God, and in three days dost rebuild it; save thy own self." Herod's white robe was a mockery, and the soldiers who saluted Him, "Hail! king of the Jews," derided Him as God and King. As God, He was mocked in His two highest prerogatives; knowledge of the future, exemption from death: "Christ, prophecy who has struck you!" "He saved others; himself He cannot save." He was mocked as King in His thorn-crowned head and in the title nailed to the cross.

What could have given these foreign soldiers the cruel idea of crowning Christ, if not this double current of thought which worked upon men's minds at the moment of the Passion? He claimed to be the Son of God; let us prove it! To Pilate He avowed Himself a king. The throng gathered, and the vociferating mob surged forward to the ceremony of the crowning,

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ranging themselves in a circle to await the Victim who emerged fainting from the scourging, a pitiful object, with scarce the semblance of a man. The garments covering His bent form were saturated with blood. He trembled, turned pale and red by turns, swayed, and like the grape-gatherer who treads the wine-press, was intoxicated and red as with the blood of grapes.

“I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the Gentiles there is not a man with me: I have trampled on them in my indignation, and have trodden them down in my wrath, and their blood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my apparel.” (Isa. 63 : 3).

He was stripped, He was seated in the center of the Pretorium—and upon this wan and swaying figure, bereft of all strength, save the virile courage of silence, was thrown a worn court mantle, the purple remnant of a military cloak. Decked out in this garment of derision, He is now proclaimed a King in all the bravery of a strip of

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purple. Arrayed in Pilate's cast-off raiment, He passed at once to the ranks of princes and conquerors: "Hail! King of the Jews!"

We have no details of this indignity offered to Jesus, but it was evident that only a crown was wanting to complete the farce. Having hit upon the idea, a fagot of thorns was sought for in a neighboring hedge, or perchance a discarded, blood-stained branch that had served for the flagellation. The iron gauntlets of the soldiers seized it, twisted it into shape, and pressed it brutally upon His brow. But the thorny circle slipped from the head which, despite all His efforts, bent under its weight. Then they drove it down almost to the ears by a heavy blow. Like a helmet bristling with spikes it covered the whole top of the head, tearing scalp and temples. Large drops of blood oozed from these wounds and trickled down the divine face and into the soiled and matted beard. The picture was complete. Behold your King!

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The court was assembled, and the courtiers were ready to pay Him homage. All was done in haste, for Herod was waiting, and in the street the Jews were becoming restless, gathered as they were on the other side of the triple stone arch which formed the door of the Pretorium and gave entrance, by three large openings, to the Roman road.

Mockery is at once an evil thing and a weakness. One mocks at what one is powerless to destroy, looking to sarcasm to weaken opposition. Few men, even superior men, can resist mockery. Ridicule kills. Jesus alone, and His supreme work, the Church, are above such weakness. Therein lies the proof of the divinity of the Church. It has endured through the ages, jeered at and mocked, yet always the same, eternal and triumphant.

IX

The Scepter

THE crowning with thorns was an unpremeditated episode in the Passion, a cruelty not included in the original plan, a satanic idea which germinated in the brain of a legionary, and was executed with all the impetuosity of an evil desire. It was intended not so much to inflict physical pain, as to heap ridicule upon the Victim. And one had but to gaze upon that pitiful object to realize that no detail had been overlooked that could add to His suffering and humiliation. Christ was stripped of His clothing, His body was scarred and furrowed with stripes, and half clad in the tawdry royal mantle that barely reached to His knees. His hands were bound, and a mock scepter in the right hand completed the royal trappings. This wand was not the soft and flexible reed that bent

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to the breeze, but a knotted stick such as was used to beat the dust out of the soldiers' coats. Evidently the first stick at hand was made to serve as a travesty of a royal scepter.

The soldiers, having amused themselves in thus accoutering a king, now approached slowly and respectfully, and with bended knee, solemnly saluted Him. Hail! King of the Jews! Still in the position of homage, one spat in His face; another, rising to his feet, dealt Him a stinging blow and the scepter, loosely held, fell from His inert hand. A third seized it as it fell and amidst the ribald laughter and hurrahs, he struck the thorn-crowned head. The game was much to their liking and each struggled to outdo the other in insults and effrontery. Although we have not been told the number of soldiers, it is probable that the actors in this improvised drama were sufficiently numerous to insure the uninterrupted succession of blows and indignities, administered to the noisy applause and delight of the spectators.

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That adorable face, that head and body were already covered with blood. What must have been their condition after having been the target for such outrages and violence? The imagination recoils from the scene. The lashed and bruised flesh had taken on the color of the mantle, the head and face were encrimsoned, and there in the Pretorium, encompassed by soldiers who were, for the most part, young, brawny, desperate characters, vulgar in laughter and speech, an unhappy creature was crushed, reduced to a bloody mass of excoriated flesh.

“Behold the Man! Behold your King! I bring Him to you,” said Pilate later from the terrace surmounting the great gate, to the mob that swarmed breathless below. “Behold I bring Him to you,” he repeated, exhibiting Him to the vulgar gaze of a rabble drunk with blood.

There Christ stood, in blood-soaked garments, humiliated and shamed, in His tattered and scanty mantle, His

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head bent under the crown of thorns, the scepter trembling in His hand.

“Behold the Man!” But was it a man? His features could no longer be recognized and His eyes lingered with inexpressible sadness on the vociferating crowd below.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings . . .” (Matt. 23 : 37).

In truth these children are assembled about Him, not seeking protection, but clamouring for His death. “Away with Him! Crucify Him!”

“Oh, My people, what have I done to thee?” A silent dialogue went on between this shouting mob, hurling hatred and blasphemy, and Christ with His thoughts of love.

HOW often that still small voice, the voice of Jesus, is heard in the secret of our souls, amidst the tumult of our passions. For the drama is always the same. The Saviour stands before me.

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Below, the crowd of evil desires clamors to be heard. Jesus' voice is tender and suppliant. But the passions demand pleasure, satisfaction—and how often, alas! we deliver to the mob the blood-stained, lacerated body of Christ, as Pilate is about to do. "Away with Him! Crucify Him!"

And now Jesus is paraded before them, Pilate leading Him back and forth, stopping at intervals to present the King, who submits without protest to this humiliating exhibition.

In the church of Our Lady of Sion in Jerusalem, and on the ruins of the triumphal arch upon which Jesus, the thorn-crowned King, was exhibited to the accompaniment of "Behold the Man! Behold the King!" a gold crown, a royal diadem, has been placed in homage and reparation by some devout soul, at the foot of the statue of the Ecce Homo.

Be Thou King, O Christ, be Thou ever my King! In most hearts, where the world has always its secret corner, Jesus finds little place for His mantle of

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derision, His crown and scepter; such is the folly and ingratitude of men. But let us, too, render Him secret homage, placing a crown of sacrifice and abnegation at the feet of our blessed Redeemer. Would that Christ were the king of all hearts! Alas! now, as then, only a few choice souls acknowledge Him as He stands on the terrace above the great gate, a king of the stage, mocked and derided: "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Of the three arches that compose the gate through which Jesus was presented to the people, one has been built into the church of Our Lady of Sion, where the faithful chant and pray and make expiation for their sins. A larger one is half in the church and half in the street, and under it an indifferent crowd passes daily. The third belongs to the Mohammedans. Of the three, only one is entirely in the hands of Christians.

X

The Meeting with His Mother

IT IS related that when Jesus was condemned to death and delivered to the Jews to be crucified, there arose from the square a mighty clamor of satisfaction and hatred which, to the ears of the Mother who had sought refuge in a house in the main street, meant that the end was at hand.

Supported by a friend, our Blessed Lady set out to await at the gate the dolorous procession that was being hastily formed in the interior of the guard-house. Four soldiers were requisitioned to carry the nails, the ropes, the hammers and the ladder. The law required that a Roman centurion should preside at the execution, making five men in all, destined to take part in the final act of the drama. It is not assuming too much to assert that possibly many others, servants of the Pretorium

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or Roman soldiers, obtained permission to join the cortège of the famous King, or that yet others were officially appointed. Pilate had delivered Jesus to the Jews, and this bloodthirsty mob awaited their Victim.

In the front ranks were found the priests, the scribes, the ancients, the principal members of the Sanhedrin, with, most likely, their following of servants and soldiers, making a closely wedged and compact escort. The cross was brought forth and held erect by a man at the foot of the stairway. Jesus appeared at the top of those twenty-eight steps (now to be seen in Rome), and descended slowly, escorted like a prince by servants and soldiers, His hands free for the first time.

Never did monarch carry himself with greater dignity, pride and majesty than did Jesus in that short descent which was to end on the Cross, the royal purple of His blood marking every step of His passage.

At the foot of the stairs the executioners laid violent hold on Him and

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charged Him with the cross. Whether Jesus carried it over His shoulder or flat on His back cannot be authentically stated; but it is certain that His hands held the arms, and that the foot of the cross dragged on the ground. In this position it struck the stones and unevennesses of the road at every step, inflicting raw abrasions on the Master's already bleeding shoulders and excoriated body—by this time one great wound. The flagellations, the contusions occasioned by blows from hand, fist and stick had left no sound spot on His body, so that every movement, the contact even of His garments, became a separate torture.

The signal had been given to advance; the trumpets sounded, the uproar increased in volume as the swaying, gesticulating human mass was set in motion, at a pace that carried Jesus forward, stumbling under His load. Sweat and blood disfigured His beloved face, barely distinguishable through the tangled meshes of matted hair. The crowd, excited and morbid, peered at

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Him, eager to behold the traces of past suffering, the signs of approaching death.

Great haste marked the funereal progress, the Jews desiring the immediate murder of their Victim before the great Sabbath; or perhaps this haste betrayed uneasiness lest the Wonder-Worker might resort to magic and thus escape them. Be that as it may, they were eager to make short work of His execution.

The streets of Jerusalem were narrow, and the crowd, the prey of passion, pressed upon Jesus; they jolted and knocked Him about, jarring the cross upon His swaying figure. From the exit of the great gate of the arches, over which Jesus had been exposed, the street descended sharply, meeting at right angles the main road which ran through the Tyropeon Valley. The escort was closing in; the cries were deafening; the priests and ancients who led the procession, hurried the pace, until Jesus, carried forward to the foot of the declivity and swept on by the

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movement, fell heavily under the weight of the cross. Blood flowed from His mouth and nostrils; with difficulty the cross was lifted, and Jesus put on His feet again. A murmur of compassion came from a group of women, as, pale and livid, He rose from the ground. But no pity moved the hearts of the executioners as they hurried forward, turning to the left where the street was straight and level for a few yards. Jesus, covered with blood and dust from His fall, struggled on, His strength failing at every step, His body bending lower under His burden.

He had already seen Magdalen when suddenly, before an open door, he perceived his Mother, supported by some women. Instinctively she stretched out her arms, the movement of a mother before whom all was obliterated save her son. Jesus slightly lifted His head and cast one glance toward her; then the procession swept on, disappearing in a turmoil of shouts, a cloud of dust.

Mary's arms remained extended and empty. She gazed longingly after

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the beloved figure of her Son, already lost in the moving crowd. What a world of anguish and love was in that look, and that silence! There is a pain that lies too deep for words; the eyes alone betray it. At such moments soul speaks to soul, ignoring the envelope of flesh.

THE spiritual life knows such moments. Jesus passes; the soul extends its arms and would seize Him, but He is already gone. Yet He has cast a look in passing, and like Mary the soul sets out to follow her Master. Fascinated by that one glance, she will go with Him, even to Calvary. Broken, bleeding, suffering, on she goes, nor rests nor halts, until, fainting and pale, she stands at the foot of the Cross.

Thus even amid the ignominies and humiliations of His Passion, Jesus manifested His divine power. A word from Him and the soldiers fell on their faces in the garden. He looked upon Peter, and in an instant Peter's soul was shaken to its depths and he went

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forth weeping bitterly. His glance fell on His Mother and she followed, urged by the goad of love to Calvary's summit. A word from the dying lips of Jesus gave paradise to the Good Thief.

The bitter rind of the Passion must be broken if we would find the hidden fruit of His divinity. Jesus acts in the soul only through suffering; and salvation is to those alone who conform to Christ and to Christ crucified (Rom. 8 : 29).

Behold the howling, gesticulating, hostile mob pressing upon Jesus! The cross weighed heavily upon His shoulders; His friends were few and not to be distinguished in the crowd laboring up the steep and deserted street to the Judgment Gate that gave exit from the city. All was gloom and confusion. Are there, perhaps, in your life barren wastes of gloom and desolation? If so, take heart. You are on the royal road; the Master walks before, and it is upon Calvary that He gives paradise.

This sorrowful meeting between Jesus and His Mother is an episode dear to

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the piety of those who love Golgotha's heights. At the spot where, it is presumed, this meeting took place, a crypt has been built, wherein, upon an ancient mosaic, the imprint of a woman's feet are visible in glistening white stone. There Mary stood when Jesus passed. One gazes lovingly and in wonder at the impression of those feet turned toward the Pretorium, from which Jesus had come.

No detail of a child's life is wanting in interest to a mother—and what of that most perfect of all mothers waiting there in the agony and desolation predicted by Simeon—waiting the passing of her Son who went to His death!

XI

The Aid Rendered Begrudgingly

THAT meeting between Jesus and His Mother was as a sword plunged into His divine Heart; from that moment the bitter waters of His Passion seemed to flow over and inundate His whole being. The sight of that desolate Mother with her outstretched arms, and His inability to approach her, opened a new, a vast, an unexplored abyss of suffering in which, broken and helpless, the Son of man struggled, as He was driven along the Tyropeon road, bearing His cross. It was one of those turning-points which, once passed, leaves all hope behind. Thus the sight of that being, dear beyond all expression, was the keenest instrument of suffering in the whole Passion. Only those who have felt the ache of such anguish can under-

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stand this fresh wound in the divine Heart.

The procession was nearing Calvary. The steep climb began for Jesus at the spot where He met His Mother. From then on He could see her only from afar until His dying eyes rested upon her beloved form at the foot of the cross, faithful and valiant during those hours of agony and approaching separation. To the right of the Tyropeon road, a few steps beyond the place of meeting and near the spot where tradition placed the house of Dives, a narrow street mounted steep and rocky to the exit from the city at the Judgment Gate.

The bodies of the animals sacrificed in the temple for the sins of the people were carted off beyond the ramparts, and for this same reason, St. Paul tells us, Jesus, the expiring Lamb, was led near the gate beyond the walls. Let us follow Him also beyond the ramparts, carrying on our shoulders the cross that so dishonors us in the sight of men—"For we have not here a

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lasting city, but we seek one that is to come" (Hebr. 13 : 14).

Three incidents marked this last sharp ascent of Calvary: the meeting with Simon of Cyrene, the meeting with Veronica, and that short pause before the group of weeping women. At the moment of entering the street to the right, where it rose abruptly between the gloomy walls of the houses, Jesus showed signs of such extreme exhaustion that those about Him feared He could never reach the top. Yet no aid was proffered Him, for to carry the cross of one condemned was a dishonor. "I sought among those about Me for one to help Me and I did not find him." The soldiers were not there for such work; the crowd drew off, and during the noisy and hurried discussion, Jesus was failing visibly.

In carrying our cross, the true cross, the cross that weighs most heavily, we are nearly always alone. Our friends, even the most loyal, marvel at our want of courage and are annoyed at our weakness and apparent need of

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help. Our lassitude is cowardice, our sufferings are misplaced sensitiveness. The world demands serenity in those it leads to death.

Oh, Jesus, Thy weakness is my comfort and strength; broken reed that I am and trampled under foot, it is upon Thee I lean as my tower of strength.

At this critical moment, a man returning from the country, carrying a basket and his tools, came upon the procession halted in the Tyropeon road. At the sight of this brawny peasant, strong in sinew and limb, a son of toil, the soldiers paused, for in him they saw the aid they needed. The bargain, however, was not struck so easily; the rustic refused, pleading other and urgent occupations, and threats of violence were heard. Finally they came to terms, and he agreed to carry the cross up the winding street to the Judgment Gate. In other words, he was forced—carry that cross he must.

Jesus stood, a silent witness to this bargaining for help, and heard the

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refusal to relieve Him of His burden, because of the shame attached to it. The cross was lifted from His shoulders and with His arms hanging limply at His sides, He walked ahead, followed by Simon of Cyrene, grumbling and protesting.

The Simons of Cyrene live to-day, and I am one, dragging Christ's Cross unwillingly,—demanding release; only force of circumstances or the dread of a greater affliction constrains me to bear my burden. And Jesus walks before me, not looking back, but moving ever onward and up. "He who does not take up his cross daily and follow Me, is not My disciple."

A cross we must have, a daily one, one that humiliates us before men as we toil up Calvary. A cross that does not humble me, that is dragged reluctantly, nor carried valiantly, is not the true cross of Simon of Cyrene; it will not give meaning to my suffering, joy to my humiliation, serenity to my falls. The repugnance I feel proves its authenticity, and the longer I carry it,

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the more I feel it to be truly the Cross of Christ, of Christ, who is leading the way.

“O Blessed Cross!” exclaimed in ecstasy, St. Andrew, the apostle. “Beloved Cross long desired, and sought untiringly!” But St. Andrew’s was a privileged cross, a benign cross, the cross of the martyrs, from which a merciful God had taken its rude and shameful asperities! Should it please Thee, divine Providence, to give me such a cross, I thank Thee. But shouldst Thou lay the cross of Simon of Cyrene, Thine own, upon my shoulders, the humiliating cross, galling and pressing me, the cross one would try to evade, or accept with complaining, still, I say, O true Cross of Calvary! again and again a thousand thanks!

Prayer of a Soul Carrying its Cross

HOW bitter, O my God, is Thy will for me to-day. The cross I dreaded the most is the one that I must carry. A cross devoid of humiliations is incom-

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plete. Complete mine, O my God! Then nothing will be lacking to crucify and conquer me. Death could utterly destroy me, and death is more welcome than life; but Thou dost want me to live in order to suffer and love. I love Thee, my God, and although I weep, I submit. In a few short years I shall not be here to hang my head before contemptuous looks and cruel words. I shall be in the sight of the angels and saints, blessing the suffering days and hours that won me paradise. Oh, yes, my God! For all the favors Thou hast shown me, and for this cross that Thou hast given me, be Thou blessed and eternally praised and thanked. Amen.

XII

The Kindness Proffered Willingly

THE street that led to the Judgment Gate was narrow and steep, with a stairway of shallow steps, slanting and slippery; and in certain places (judging by what it is to-day) there was scarcely room for four people to walk abreast. To the left a woman waited, at the doorstep of her house, to see Jesus pass; and as she caught sight of Him, a cry of anguish escaped her lips. That gentle face of the fairest of men, on which she had gazed in days past, fascinated by the luster that shone from it, was now a terrifying mask of blood and sweat, furrowed with dirt, with beard soiled and dank. About this shapeless Being there was an air of languor and weakness, the bearing of a man going to his death, the resignation of one who knows his doom is sealed.

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Jesus looked at the woman as He passed by. . . .

No longer able to restrain the compassion that surged through her, she tore the long, soft veil from her head, and oblivious of all about her, rushed forward, almost touching Jesus in the narrow street, and gave it to Him.

The good Master's hands were for the moment free. He wiped His soiled face, while the soldiers jostled the woman and finally thrust her back to the doorstep, amidst the cries of the escort and the continued protests of Simon of Cyrene. This moment of rest and comfort was dearly bought. The executioners, enraged at the trifling relief offered their Victim, hastened to charge Him once more with His cross, in order to put an end to these attentions. Jesus, although fainting from weakness, submitted in silence. The pious woman entered her house, trembling with emotion, and Simon of Cyrene, relieved of his load, took up his basket and tools and turned in the direction of the city, pleased that an

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untoward incident had relieved him of the heavy and shameful weight of the cross, all oblivious of the immense honor that was his, in the relief he had given his fainting Lord.

But he will realize it long afterward. Many things in life are only understood in retrospect and this is particularly true of crosses and trials. Yet on the Last Day, when He comes to judge the living and the dead in the shadow of that gigantic and radiant Cross, how proud we shall be to have carried the burden of the Master! With what joy we shall offer one mite of our own to add to its glory, and bare to the Son of man our shoulders bruised by the cross He has sent us, as He exposes to the gaze of assembled humanity, His pierced hands and feet. Simon of Cyrene played a role in the great drama of the Passion, and his name lives because, even though grumbling and protesting, he carried for a few yards the cross of Christ. If God accords such glory and assurance of salvation to him who, though protesting and constrained,

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followed Him in His sorrowful way, what will He not do for those who accept with submission the cross with which He tries His elect? Holy Cross! Blessed Cross! Daily Cross! thou art my sole hope of salvation and predestination!

The pious woman Veronica, upon returning to her house, laid the stained veil upon a table, not daring to look at it. At her door she still heard the tramping of passing feet and the shouts of death as the procession moved onward. The face of Christ haunted her; she could not rest within, and so she joined the crowd once more and followed on to Calvary with but one thought in her heart: to see that face again. Like Peter on the previous night, she must know what befalls Him, must gaze once more upon the face she had wiped and dried, fascinated now by its pallor and horror, as formerly she had been fascinated by the radiance that had shone from the countenance of the Son of man.

It belongs to God alone to attract us to Him through opprobrium; nay, more,

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to urge us to reproduce in ourselves His disfigured visage, or to rejoice if this divine resemblance falls to our lot. For that powerful face of Christ, the face of a condemned man, livid and blood-stained, is the true face of the elect. And what faces one sees among Christ's followers, radiant, despite forgetfulness and contempt. However great may be our falls and infidelity, if we have the face of the elect, Jesus will recognize the resemblance. We have been saved once by the pallor and abjectness of those holy features and we shall again be saved by our resemblance to Him in sorrow. The world is mad. Men are mad. He alone is sane who suffers as Christ has suffered.

Wait, be patient, ye elect, struck at and mocked; the radiance of your face will blind, in the Last Day, those who now spit upon it. "And they indeed went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus" (Acts 5 : 41). Such is the triumphant march of all the martyrs,

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going forth rejoicing because they are oppressed and dishonored for Christ's sake. "The world is filled with martyrs," says St. Gregory. All those who in temptation do violence to their hearts, their thoughts, their memories, their bodies, their souls, are martyrs of Christ, with the face of the elect.

At the spot where Jesus met Veronica and on the place where once stood the house of that pious woman, a sort of crypt has been built. Descending into an obscurity illumined here and there by votive candles and lamps, one discerns a sculptured group, a highly colored Christ in a red robe, His cross upon His shoulders, and opposite Him, Veronica. The faithful approach this statue on their knees. I have seen women cover with kisses the arms, hands, and cross of Christ. What other Being has awakened, through the course of the ages, a similar enthusiasm? What other statue is kissed with such love after a lapse of two thousand years? This one alone, because it represents our wounded God.

XIII

The Sympathy of Strangers

SLOWLY and painfully Jesus climbed to the Judgment Gate. Entering the city through it, one found one's self in the crooked streets alive with the traffic of the bazaars. In Jesus' time, the gate gave on to a moat, or ditch, which ran under the walls and across the rocky plain from which Calvary emerged. At this point the procession halted, and the mob gathered to hear the sentence read for the last time, to the accused.

As Jesus came into the full view of the plain, with the sinister silhouette of Calvary at his left, He lifted His eyes and beheld that sea of faces, distorted with hatred, thirsting for blood, each struggling to get near enough to note the effect of the death sentence upon Him. Every eye was fixed on Christ: His pallor was commented on, the

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morbid curiosity of the mob feasted on the pitiful spectacle of the last moments of a condemned criminal. The "brutal expectancy" spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles with regard to Peter, glutted itself, as in the last act of a drama, upon the Victim exhibited before them.

Then the herald's voice rang out: "This man, Jesus of Nazareth, agitator, seducer of the people, has proclaimed Himself King of the Jews. For this crime His compatriots, the priests and ancients, have delivered Him into the hands of the law to be crucified. Advance, lictor, and prepare the cross!"

But the cross was ready, and even now cutting into the shoulders of the malefactor. Shouts of approval rose from the crowd; Jesus saw and heard all. The procession moved on, turning to the left, where began that last ascent from which there was no return. At this moment Jesus suddenly sank to earth. This time it was more difficult to drag Him to His feet. No Simon of Cyrene was near to be pressed into

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service, and the crowding, shuffling mass began to murmur. They expected an exhibition, a show, and behold, they had before them only an unfortunate creature, trembling and swooning from weakness! But compassionate women stood weeping, where the road turned upward to Calvary, and the note of sorrow rang true above the blasphemies of an entire people. It arrested Jesus' attention. He stopped, and He who spoke no word to His Mother, nor to Peter, nor to Veronica, had words of consolation for these pious souls.

“Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over me; but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For behold, the days shall come, wherein they shall say: Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that have not borne, and the paps that have not given suck. . . . For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?” (Luke 23 : 28-31).

This time the soldiers did not interfere. Jesus wished to speak. He is master when He wills it. Truly, it was

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not the despised, fainting, agonizing Messiah who was the object of compassion: He of whom it was written: "The Son of man goes forth, but woe to those who betray and abandon the Christ dying for us." Jesus' words tell us plainly that our pity must be for the executioners. Not for the Victim, not for those who climb Calvary, but for those who drive them there. These are the greater sinners—and if God permits that the green wood be thus treated, what shall be done to the oppressors of the just, those dead to grace, the dried wood devoid of life? Verily, I say to you, ye are fit for everlasting fire. Dried and barren wood, ye shall be the imperishable food of a slow, eternal flame, that shall burn so long as it has aliment to feed on. And ye are *immortal!*

These words of Christ are the consolation of afflicted souls. Their name is legion, and God permits their suffering and is silent. This very silence should strike the oppressor and evil-doer with terror, for a day will come when this

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chaff will fly before the wind of divine wrath, and when this wrath will seek out the smallest atom, should it hide in the ends of the earth. What availeth all the greatness of the world before the power of God?

The ambitious who have sought fame and renown among men, will then be mendicants. With what anguish shall they seek a hole in the mountain wherein to hide, and shall not find it! Thus, in His last and deepest humiliation, Jesus gives a glimpse of His final justice. Before His judges He had announced, "On the Last Day you shall see the Son of man in all the greatness of His majesty," and when about to climb Calvary, with more sadness but none the less authority, He stated: "Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: Fall upon us; and to the hills: Cover us. For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 23 : 30, 31).

The effort Jesus made to speak to the daughters of Jerusalem at the

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moment of climbing the steep incline, had exhausted His little remaining strength. A third and last time He fell, face downward to the ground. It became evident to the executioners that they were dragging a man more dead than alive, and they began to fear there was not enough breath left in Him to reach the summit; that they would lay a dead man on the cross, and drive the nails through insensible flesh. At all hazard, and at any price, they must get Him on the cross alive. The Sacred Text tells us that the soldiers supported and all but carried Jesus to the summit. This physical exhaustion was the last instrument of torture before the crucifixion. Jesus felt it keenly. Trembling He went to His execution; His weakness all the more humiliating in One who had proclaimed Himself the Messiah, the Son of God, He who had existed before Abraham was, the Restorer of Israel, the Son of David. What biting derision these assertions excite in the minds of the spectators!

We believed in Him, said the dis-

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ciples of Emmaus, we hoped in Him. Yes, yesterday. . But to-day? What a pitiful epilogue to a life filled with miracles and prodigies! What folly to have posed as a founder of a new religion and to end in shame! What belief can one place in a man who, after accomplishing such wonders, dies miserably and like a coward?

This apparent failure is a particular characteristic of the Passion. Only to rare and strong souls does Christ give it, to those who have plumbed the depths of the love of God; those who, dead to self, seek no longer their own satisfaction, but His glory alone.

This humiliation of suffering, this weakness and faint-heartedness, is the last supreme test. To suffer the contempt of those who esteem courage in others and cultivate it in themselves—let him alone, to whom this great grace is given, understand it if he can, and love and embrace it with ardor!

Shouldst Thou press this chalice, O Jesus, to lips that tremble, shouldst Thy Cross be placed in arms that fall

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inert, should I let the bitterness poured into my heart flow out as from a broken and worthless vessel, still, in this heart despised by all, I shall bless Thy adorable bounty, that has bound me closer to Thee on the rugged summit of Calvary.

XIV

The Nails

THE final tragedy was now at hand. Shortly before arriving at the summit, the soldiers who were half dragging, half carrying Jesus, halted a little, while the executioners prepared for the sacrifice. The cross had been taken from Jesus, and laid on the ground, where the foot was trimmed and rounded so as to fit firmly in the hole cut in the rock.

Jesus could plainly see and hear these preparations for the execution, mingled with the shouting of the soldiers, the blasphemies of the two brigands who were to be crucified with Him, and the voices of the attendants clamoring for a speedy end to the triple execution. Below, the mob was talking and gesticulating, a tumultuous mass. The summit of Calvary was too small to admit the crowds of spectators; so they

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passed the time in impatient protest at the delay, and in pleasantries at the expense of the criminal whose death agonies they had come to witness. The priests moved about in pompous activity; a few of the chief ones went up to the summit to inspect the preparations at close range. Others guarded Jesus. Grimacing faces leaned over Him, marked with hatred and with every evil passion.

Midway between Calvary and the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, in a retired corner of the valley and opposite Golgotha, stood a group of weeping women. In their midst was one nobler of mien and more sorrowful, the object of the affection and sympathy of all. It was Mary, the Mother of the Condemned.

“And all his acquaintance, and the women that had followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things” (Luke 23 : 49). Near them was gathered a part of the populace, consumed with hatred. “And the people stood beholding and the rulers with

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them derided him, saying: He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the elect of God" (Luke 23 : 35). And passersby, the curious ones found always on the edge of a crowd, formed a second group, noisy and restless. For as Calvary was close to the city, the people flocked there, inspecting the mound and lingering, morbidly hoping to witness the suffering of the Victim at the moment of crucifixion. When Christ finally hung there, livid, His arms extended on the cross, then a cry of gluttoned passion rent the air.

But now the attention of the crowd was focused on the soldiers who led a swaying, stumbling figure. A hush fell on the crowd. First the white garment was removed, then the red tunic; and the shivering body, streaked with blood and furrowed with blows, was exposed to the vulgar gaze. Oh, Jesus! no humiliation was spared Thee! "Because for Thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face." (Ps. 58 : 8) So hast Thou said through Thy prophet.

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All was ready. The cross was laid on the ground, Jesus was brutally pushed toward it, and His body extended on the hard wood. Only the executioners were then on Calvary. From below their movements were followed with malignant attention.

Jesus could not be seen, but from the crouching attitude of the soldiers one knew that the nailing was about to begin. An arm was lifted, the first blow of the hammer sounded in the still air; the first nail sank into one of Christ's hands. Then blow followed blow in rapid succession. The dull stroke was heard as far as the ramparts, so silent was the crowd that listened.

Let us, too, approach, and listen, and count the blows!

Brutality marked every movement and action of the crucifixion; even the sharp strokes of the hammer seemed to express hatred and cruelty. A soldier held the extended hand in order that the contraction of the fingers might not interfere with the progress

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of the nail as it pierced the flesh. The one who wielded the hammer was seated almost on Christ's shoulder; the others held His body, trembling, quivering with pain. The divine face, half-hidden beneath the meshes of His hair, was thrown upward, terrifying in its lividity. The right hand made fast, the left one was nailed, then the feet. The difficulty of fastening the feet made the torture unspeakable. The sharp quadrangular nails tore the flesh as they were driven in, up to the head, and then riveted behind. Christ's form was stretched to its utmost limits, since the sagging of the body and the ever widening wounds must be allowed for in the nailing. The shoulders were wrenched out of joint; the dislocated bones protruded: "They have numbered all my bones" (Ps. 21:18). The chest was cruelly thrust forward, and the trunk of the body pressed hard against the wood. The blood flowed in streams, and a quiver ran through the agonizing flesh.

Then the cross was dragged to the

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edge of the rock. It was lifted into an erect position by means of ladders, and fell heavily into the hole that had been dug for it, amid the moaning of the Victim and the delirious shouts of the crowd. This rough jolting caused the blood to gush forth anew.

And there Jesus hung for three hours, nailed fast, immovable, His blood dripping to the ground.

*The Body Wholly Dependent on
Wounded Hands and Feet*

IN THE fatal progress of Christ's Passion we see a steady curtailment of His liberty, each fresh privation occasioning a new form of suffering, until the last stroke of the supreme work of justice riveted Him immutably in pain.

First came the binding with ropes: then the shameful delivery into the hands of the soldiers; the blindfolding in the guard-house, the fainting and exhaustion during the ascent of Calvary, and finally the nails that fastened Him to the cross in appalling immobility.

Let us pause a moment and endeavor to form some idea of this last instrument of torture. Imagine a body suspended with all its weight on four gaping wounds, which are tearing wider

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apart minute by minute. It is an agony from which there is no escape. The least movement increases the suffering . . . and this horrible torture continues for three hours.

The sick man on his bed of pain, can turn from side to side, and although this movement may not relieve him it at least gives him a little comfort or rest. But there on the cross, no rest can be hoped for, save in death, which approaches with leaden feet.

Again, this particular form of suffering endured by our Saviour, of necessity had to be. Men, in sinning, abuse their liberty, and the just and appropriate punishment is the loss of liberty. As expiatory Victim the Son of man, who atones for all the sins of humanity, must suffer the loss of all liberty. It is by this loss that He saves sinners.

The mob sneeringly cries out: "Come down, if You can!" He can not. He is nailed fast.

There are souls who complain of being bound to some heavy, crushing cross, without hope of ever being free

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from it here below. Come, stand at the Cross of Jesus. I come, my Redeemer! Before Thee, immovable in agony, and before the nails which fasten Thee to Thy bloody task of redemption, I shall not, even in thought, desire to be relieved of a cross that Thou hast willed should faintly resemble Thine own.

When the executioners had lifted their trophy, the bleeding Victim, on high, they passed to the thieves, and three crosses reared their ghastly forms on the summit of Golgotha. Then the barrier was removed and a rush was made for a better view of the Christ, suspended between two malefactors. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself. (John 12 : 32).

We can imagine the soldiers bracing themselves to hold back the onrushing crowd, eager to witness the triple execution. In this onrush the holy women stationed near the mound, were carried forward to the foot of the cross. Although blinded with blood, Christ had

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discerned them in the distance; but even this comfort was snatched from Him and obscured by the faces that pressed in an evil swarm below the three gibbets. "They surrounded me like bees, and they burned like fire among thorns: and in the name of the Lord I was revenged on them" (Ps. 117 : 12).

To this burning hatred was added the cruel cowardice that abuses weakness. When the Victim was fastened and powerless to defend Himself, it would surely appear that the death which was about to claim Him would satisfy their revenge and still their hatred.

Those who are really crucified with Jesus must pass through calumny and detraction. The world will continue to prattle about what it sees, and pass judgment where it has no knowledge of facts; but it will always judge falsely. Hence the just seek their consolation in the sole testimony of conscience, by which all will be judged on that Last Day.

Moreover, where find the weapons

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to defend one's self against evil tongues? Persecuted and pursued by his enemies, David cried out: "Lord, render mute these mouths of gall and protect thy servant against the evil tongues of his enemies." My weakness and helplessness cry out to Thee, too, O Lord! to be delivered from those who persecute me. But when I draw near the Cross, that target for the blasphemies of the populace, my love arrests this prayer on my lips, and I would drink of the very same chalice as my Redeemer. I shall drink of it, O Lord, and invoke Thy name as my strength and support!

From the moment the cross was lifted, the heavens began to darken and the sun was veiled. The crowd, absorbed in the spectacle, seemed at first oblivious of this phenomenon; but gradually the light failed, and darkness fell upon Calvary, the Garden of Gethsemani, and the city of Jerusalem, and according to the Evangelist, spread over the entire earth.

This weird night, descending sud-

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denly and hiding the divine Victim, threw consternation into the ranks of the spectators; blaspheming voices were silenced, one by one; the guards could no longer distinguish the figures of the dying trio and they were awed into silence.

Terrified at this revulsion of nature, the crowd fled, leaving on the desolate summit only some moving shadows, lost in wonder, speaking in whispers. Under cover of the darkness, the holy women approached and unmolested, took their stand at the foot of the cross: Magdalen, Mary Cleophas, and a few others, and in the front rank, Mary His Mother, and one single disciple, John the beloved. Jesus, through the oppressive gloom, distinguished these faithful figures. His eyes rested longingly on them, but this supreme consolation was at the same time another torture, for the sight of His Mother was a renewal of the meeting on the Via Crucis; and the presence of the Beloved Disciple was but a poignant reminder of the abandonment of the

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Apostles. Of the eleven, John alone was at the foot of the cross.

Jesus gazed on them in silence. Between the first three words spoken by Jesus before darkness fell, and the last four, three hours of oppressive silence had elapsed. Three hours of immobility and darkness! Let us try to enter into this last anguish, to stand in the darkness at the foot of the Cross, to listen in silence, and imitate Our Lord!

All methods of torture had been exhausted only death remained. His body had been struck and lacerated; all the sufferings inflicted along the road, had been renewed on Calvary. Every preceding torture was there repeated with all the refinements of cruelty. The divine body was stretched upon the wood of the cross, where each torture could chant not only the hymn of sorrow, but also the hymn of victory.

Beloved Jesus! it remains for me to penetrate still deeper into the fathomless sea of Thy Passion, and from that mangled body my eyes turn to Thy

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divine Heart, crushed, bruised, opened, pierced through and through.

From my place on my knees at the foot of the Cross during these three hours of silence and obscurity, where I hear only the murmur of Thy supplication, the moaning of Thine agony, I go back over the wave of sorrow and blood that swept Thee here, and seek Thy divine Heart, so cruelly buffeted by the waters of bitterness. Thy Heart that has loved me even unto death!

Oh! all ye that pass, pause a moment and see if there exists a sorrow that can compare with the sorrow of Jesus on the cross!

PART SECOND

Tortures of the Heart

I

Outraged Dignity

IN STUDYING Our Lord's sufferings and His life during the days that preceded His Passion, we discern in Him two dominant sentiments. The first was the comprehension of His own dignity; the second was a profound and lively tenderness toward those He was about to leave. In fact the principal thought—one that persistently found expression—was that His sufferings would be an occasion of scandal for His own.

What more incomprehensible to His followers than that this messenger from God, this Messiah, should be delivered over to the Gentiles, spat upon, crushed under foot, furrowed with stripes, crowned in blood, and finally crucified! And yet Jesus must prepare these disciples of His for this very event. He does so by words, by veiled allusions, even, at times, by reproof.

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"No, Lord," protested Peter, "that can never come to pass! Thee, Lord, scourged and crucified!" "Verily, this is a hard saying and who can bear it?"

And yet, Peter, such will come to pass, and thou, in thy old age, when thou hast understood all, shall deliver thyself to the same cross, and suffer the same ignominy!

But the meaning of Christ's words were hidden from Peter then. He, like the others, did not understand, just as we often find it impossible to understand the terrible necessity for the interior, the personal, the public Calvaries which we must undergo. "It behooved Christ to suffer." And God often uses our whole existence in an endeavor to make us understand the necessity of suffering. Understand it we must, if we would be saved.

But in the meantime, Jesus was solicitous for His disciples. He warned them, turning for them, in advance, the bloody pages of the book of the Passion. He knew full well that He would become a repugnant object, from whom

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men would recoil, shuddering,—a worm writhing in dust and blood, a “Man of Sorrows.” Yes, but behind this pitiful face there is a God: “Forget it not, My little ones!” Because He is going to demean Himself, forsake His rank and position, descend into the depths of opprobrium, man must not forget who He is, whence He comes, and with whom He abides eternally. “A little while and you shall not see Me,” sadly He reiterates, “but know you, that I come from God, that I return to Him, and that I am one with Him. Behold, I speak plainly that all may understand.”

“Verily Thou speakest the truth,” replied the Apostles, “and we believe that Thou art the Son of God.”

“Ye believe. But when the hour cometh all will flee and leave Me.” With such mixed sentiments of emotion and feeling, Jesus affirmed His divinity at the very moment when it was about to suffer an eclipse.

An assertion of our rank and position before those who would trample upon

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us, is but natural. All men of strong character and sterling worth owe this as a duty to themselves and the world. This personal dignity is the last possession a man is willing to lose. In that tragic, historical scene at Varennes, where the passion of the French royalty began, the king's family was brutally cornered by a jeering mob in a common grocer's shop. There, at the sight of Louis XVI ridiculously accoutered in the attire of a servant, the blood of generations of kings revolted in Marie Antoinette, and at the vulgarity of the surroundings and the familiarity with which the mob touched and handled a prince of the blood, she flushed with indignation and exclaimed: "After all, he *is* the King!" Alas, later on she was to pronounce those sad and touching words: "We willingly accept a Calvary, if only we can climb it!"

The proud consolation of being able to show one's self great in suffering is not given to every man. In such moments one often falls, not only in one's own esteem, but in the esteem of

the world. Jesus knew that even this particular humiliation was reserved for Him. While accepting it, His human nature clung to the respect and consideration of His disciples, and in His profound abasement He longed to feel that in the hearts of His followers at least, He remained a King. It is neither sin nor crime to suffer when we are set aside and humiliated, nor is a legitimate demand that we be treated with respect forbidden to us.

This is most consoling, my Jesus. But it is terrifying to think that we may be called to suffer contempt, and to be dishonored by our own, that we may more faithfully reproduce Thy life and death in our lives, and enter into our passion humbly and with our heads bowed, even though they have been held high and are worthy of a crown!

With our Master let us repeat that word so short but rich in meaning: FIAT!

II

Emprisoned Tenderness

THE second sentiment that filled Christ's heart was a yearning desire to make manifest to His disciples His great love for them. Nowhere can we better witness this expansion of love than in His intimate conversations with them, on that last evening in the Cenacle. Long since had this place been designated for His farewell and in the circumstances attending its choice His prophetic power had once more been affirmed.

"Behold," said He to Peter and John, "as you go into the city there shall meet you a man carrying a pitcher of water—follow him into the house where he entereth in . . . and he will show you a large dining room, furnished; and there prepare" (Luke 22 : 10-12).

Thus Jesus saw all—the gate (probably the one nearest the Sion quarter,

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leading to the fountain of the Virgin, whence flowed the purest water in Jerusalem), the man, the pitcher of water, even the table laid for the repast, and the couches drawn up around it. He had, indeed, many friends whose houses were open to him at all hours. And He has them still—His poor and chosen ones, upon whose life and substance He can draw.

Therefore, it was in that room that the twelve were assembled. First a blessing was asked, all standing around the table, staffs in hand, robes tucked up, loins girded, sandals on their feet, as though about to depart on a journey. The paschal lamb occupied the center of the table, and with wild lettuce, was served to the Apostles. The repast proceeded in silence, and when they had partaken of the customary meal that followed the paschal sacrament, the Apostles thought the ceremony ended, as in former years.

But Jesus had something more to say. He rose from table, laying aside His mantle and white robe, leaving

only the crimson tunic. Taking a towel and tying it around His waist, He poured water into a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of each of His Apostles, who sat petrified at this action. Never before had the Master manifested such preference and esteem! To kneel and wash the feet of His disciples! One readily understands Peter's gesture of protest; it was beneath the dignity of God, the Master. True—but this was the hour of love. "What I do," He said, "thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13 : 7).

Such a descent from the divine heights, second evidence of His divinity, man can not understand all at once. If God did not perform actions beyond our comprehension, it would be that He was acting as man and not as God. Hence He washed and dried the feet of the Apostles amidst a silence fraught with deep emotion.

After this ceremony they once more seated themselves at table, or, rather, reclined upon couches, with Jesus in

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the center. John shared the same couch with Him, and had but to lean back to rest his head on the Master's bosom. Peter was on a couch beside Christ, and Judas could not have been far away, since Jesus, handing him a piece of bread, spoke to him in a low tone, without being overheard. Again they ate and drank in silence, all hearts filled with anxious forebodings, all eyes fixed on Jesus. The Master seemed sadder than was His wont.

That He had a weight upon His heart was evident to all. Each saw and felt it as His gaze wandered from one to the other of the Apostles. He attempted to speak, then relapsed into silence a hidden sorrow oppressed Him. "He was troubled in spirit."

The expression of His face changed.

"Amen, amen I say to you that one of you is about to betray me, one of you that eateth with me."

The Apostles were confounded, and "being sorrowful, and very much troubled," they began to question

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Him, in turn. From all sides came the anxious query: "Is it I, Lord?"

"One of the Twelve. He that dip-peth his hand with me in the dish."

And Judas, Judas who betrayed Him, asked the question also:

"Is it I, Rabbi?"

"Thou hast said it," answered Our Lord. No one heard these words, for they were uttered in a low tone. No one there save the Master knew that the traitor was present, and that there, even in the presence of such perfidy, Jesus was about to accomplish the prodigy of His love. Judas, the betrayer, Judas, who had made his bargains with the priests, and in whose pocket jingled the thirty pieces of silver—the price of a God!

Jesus knew that in a few hours He would be delivered to His enemies. He saw the clubs, the swords, the ropes and the traitor, who came to betray Him with a kiss. Knowing that He was to be made prisoner, He took the initiative now and surrendered Himself to humanity until the consumma-

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tion of time, uttering words that should make Him a captive, bound forever, hand and foot, in the Prison of the Tabernacle. So does the love of Christ triumph over the malice of the world.

The repast was drawing to a close. Before Him lay a piece of unleavened bread. He took it in His hand and blessed it and broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying:

“Take ye and eat. This is my body, which is given for you.”

When Jesus yielded Himself to mankind, He did it once for all. Never will He take back what He has surrendered. Through the ages He remains with us—and yet we give so little heed to this marvel of love. Let us beware of condemning the apparent indifference of the disciples on that dread night when they deserted their Master. Our apathy and insensibility are equally great and certainly less excusable!

The collation was finished in silence. Only the last ceremony remained to be performed before the final hymn; the

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passing of the goblet of wine which began and finished the repast, and which was drunk while giving thanks. Jesus filled the goblet, gave thanks, and handing it to the Apostles, said:

“Drink ye all of this. For this is my blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins” (Matt. 26 : 27, 28).

Jesus’ eyes seemed to follow the cup as it passed from hand to hand and lip to lip, until it reached Judas. Almost as if unable to contain Himself longer, the torture of His heart expressed itself in words. “But yet behold,” he exclaimed, “the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table!” (Luke 22 : 21). This expression terrified and startled the Apostles. Once more the confused clamor of interrogation resounded through the room. And it was at that moment that John leaned his head on Christ’s bosom as though he would console Him, asking tenderly, “Lord, who is it?”

Jesus answered: “He it is to whom I shall reach bread dipped” (John

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13 : 26). Into the ear of the beloved disciple Christ breathed these words as He handed to Judas a morsel of soaked bread. The traitor accepted it and at this moment his heart became a prey of the demon, as Holy Scripture tells us: "Satan entered into him." He rose suddenly and Jesus, seeing him about to leave, called out: "That which thou dost, do quickly."

Judas departed. It was already dusk, but Jesus' eyes followed him in a last look. And what a look! When the door closed on the traitor, a sigh of relief escaped His breast, and His face lighted up. "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him". (John 13 : 31).

Since the treachery of Judas, to be betrayed by a loved one has ever been the keenest suffering known to the human heart, and God does not spare even this to those who aspire to resemble His Son. In this we see again the characteristic of the Passion, and he who possesses this mark, possesses a sure pledge of salvation.

III

Uncomprehended Farewell

THE departure of Judas was a relief. For more than a year Jesus had lived in intimate converse with him, and the memory of this tender intercourse was now so painful to the Saviour that, goaded by intense agony of heart, He called one apostle 'demon'. "Have I not chosen you twelve; and one of you is a devil?" (John 6 : 71).

Certainly never was man forewarned as was Judas. The obduracy of the sinner is a deep mystery. Jesus' glance continues to fall upon sinners and traitors. In the same family, at the same table and hearthstone, He passes, "taking one and leaving the other." These mysteries of election are founded upon grace, the real life of our soul, and are at once both terrible and consoling. Terrible, because we

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do not see their workings, and the outward life remains unchanged; consoling, for the just who find therein a sure place of refuge from the contempt and neglect of the world.

The true family tie, the pure blood of a race, is the grace of God. "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father, that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. 12 : 50). The last election of God shall separate forever brother from sister, child from parent, wife from husband, should one be found with grace like a lighted lamp in his hand, and the other with his lamp extinguished. How many united here below seemingly by an enduring love, are already marked for this dreaded separation! Hence the necessity of looking at life and the things of life in the light of eternity and our last end.

Since the departure of Judas, a change had come over Jesus. He who a moment ago was silent and oppressed by the presence of the traitor, began now to converse tenderly and

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familiarly with His Apostles, with a special word for each of His dear ones. He addressed Peter, replied to Philip, interrogated Jude, questioned Thomas. "A little while and you shall not see me" "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, did you want any thing?" (Luke 22 : 35). But they said: "Nothing." Then said He unto them, "Then fear not. If I go, if I seem to fail you, I shall not leave you orphans: moreover, I shall return to fetch you, when I shall have prepared a place for you on high, near my Father."

"What words are these?" murmured the Apostles. "Yet a little while?" What could that mean? "Whither goest Thou, Lord? Show us Thy Father and we shall be content." They pressed Him with questions, not understanding His meaning.

Jesus did not rebuff them. This chapter of tender solicitude was to know no end: for now began the preaching of a new precept. "Love one another," He says to them, "always."

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Everywhere, love, love! In truth this is a new law, following upon hatred, the result of sin. He who lives in an habitual state of sin, becomes bad, hard, and cruel, and he who refuses God's yoke is impatient of any other. Love is the new word.

When confronted with evil, do not return evil, but repay it with good. This new law of charity is an unheard-of doctrine, elevated, strange. To do good to those who injure us is something unlooked-for, unexpected: but that is charity. To pray for our persecutors, stranger still! That again, is charity. To greet an enemy, to serve the ungrateful, to forget injuries, to smile at those who wound us, to be patient with the violent, submissive to the proud and overbearing, and everywhere and always to do good for evil! Truly this new teaching is indeed the divine charity given to men that night in the Cenacle at the washing of the feet, and at the institution of the Eucharist.

After the sacrilege of Judas and his kiss of betrayal, the sworn fidelity of Simon Peter and his denial, the protestations of the disciples and their flight in the Garden of Olives, Christ practised the first *act* of divine charity when He healed the ear of Malchus, who had come to arrest and bind Him. His first *word* was for Judas: "Friend, whereto art thou come?" But the sublime act of charity was the Passion: and until time is no more, divine charity can express itself in no other terms save love and forgiveness.

Hence it is not surprising that worldlings do not understand charity, true charity, which, like faith, is practised in interior warfare, in victory over self, the charity that is unlooked for and, at times, is passing strange. Too well we know the counterfeit charity marked as a vague philanthropy which costs nothing and gains praise. The *Christian* must hide his deeds of love and service that they may be seen by God alone, who leaves no virtuous act unrewarded.

THE time sped by all too rapidly in these last colloquies. Jesus rose. "Let us go," He said. The Hallel, the hymn of thanksgiving, was recited, and the little band left the Cenacle.

Night had fallen when Jesus and His Apostles passed through the winding street. And the Master knew that in a few hours He would pass, a bound criminal, through this narrow way which was littered with broken glass and pottery from the stalls of the vendors who bartered their wares at the gate. Around Him silence reigned, but from afar were wafted the strains of the Hallel, being sung in the houses at the termination of the Paschal repast. One by one the lights were extinguished. The little band of silent, deeply moved men descended the abrupt slope of Mount Ophel as it followed the valley of Josaphat, and ended at the stone bridge over the Cedron opposite the tomb of Absalom.

Beyond lay the silent Garden of Olives, its pale foliage bathed in the

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light of the full moon. Looking toward the vineyards discernible upon the rocky slope of Mount Ophel, the Master stopped. Here indeed was an illustration of the words He had spoken in the Cenacle—these branches pruned and bound to stakes brought out vividly His phrases:

“I am the vine; you are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit” . . .
(John 15 : 5).

It was indeed as if He would say now: “See how deeply and closely these are cut in order that they may bear fruit more abundantly! You also shall be cut down to the stem, and tied to the stake by my heavenly Father, that your sanctity may increase, and with it your power of production unto good.”

“All you,” He added, “shall be scandalized in me this night. For it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed.”

And Peter, answering, said to Him: “I will never be scandalized in thee.”

“Amen—I say to thee, that in this night before the cock crow thou wilt deny me thrice” (Matt. 26 : 31-34).

In the far East the cock crows with almost mathematical precision, about midnight and, a second time, between two and three o'clock in the morning. As Jesus pronounced this warning, Peter's denial was ringing in His ears.

GAZING into the future He heard also, my betrayals and saw my falls, after my repeated protestations and vows of love. But no ingratitude on the part of His creatures could turn Christ from His sacrifice of love, although He knew in advance the blood He would spill and the tears He would shed over their betrayals.

In approaching the bridge, the vale of Cedron narrowed suddenly and deepened into a steep path which the gloom of night, and the tangled branches of dark brush rendered difficult to discern and follow. About the tomb and in the trees, weird sounds of fluttering were heard from flocks of

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doves; for this was their favorite gathering-place, and here they were trapped for the sacrifice. The Cedron at this point was a shallow stream, red with the blood of the sacrifices emptied into its wild and rocky bed by means of subterranean conduits running from the rock of Moria.

Here Jesus stopped. His hour of darkness was approaching, and He knew that once this brooklet was passed, He would leave behind His strong and radiant divinity. One moment still remained in which to be Himself, fair of face, great and gentle, tender for His own, speaking to them with authority and free to lift His eyes to His Father. After that He would belong to divine justice. So He stopped, consecrating this last moment to a prayer for those He had loved so deeply. Never was prayer at once more tragic and heartbreaking. Offered in this dolorous setting, surrounded by the anxious and terrified eleven, Jesus, His white figure towering in the darkness, with uplifted hands,

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breathed forth, trembling, His last petitions of love. And then, in profound silence, He crossed the Cedron and entered upon His Passion.

IV

Sadness—Disgust—Terror

THE path leading to the Garden of Gethsemani was cut in the rock. It passed before the tomb of Absalom heaped with stones, and rose from then on between crumbling stone walls.

That night the garden lay bathed in moonlight, the shadows of walls, cypresses and olives lying dark on the illumined landscape. After crossing the stream, Jesus walked on ahead as was His wont, toiling up alone, His body now and then touching the walls as though He would lean against them for support. Behind came the Apostles watching His faltering movements and unsteady gait. An ominous silence weighed upon this laborious climb, rendered more oppressive by a word from Christ, as He halted at a point in the rugged path, seemingly unable to

advance further. As He turned toward them, the Apostles fell back, dismayed at His ghastly pallor.

What a contrast! Only a few moments before, He it was who had dispelled their fears; and courage, strong and vivifying, had emanated from Him to uphold their faltering hearts. So short a while before His voice had risen, steady and vibrating, like incense to the throne of His Father, in petition, nay, almost in command, expressing His will. But now, not only was there no petition, but He seemed incapable even of praying alone, since He said to His Apostles: "Sit you here, till I go yonder and pray" (Matt. 26 : 36).

Dreading solitude, He took with Him the three favored ones, Peter, James and John, saying "My soul is sorrowful even unto death; stay you here, and watch with me" (Matt. 26 : 38).

What a change! He was no longer the same. The Apostles were mystified; they had never seen Him so de-

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pressed, so wavering, so much a mere man like themselves! Sad unto tears He had at times appeared, even moved to anger, and at certain moments severe, but always was He master of Himself. Now the hand at the helm had lost its grip, and His soul floated, a wreck, at the mercy of angry and invisible waves. How could it chance that He, their leader, should be discouraged and sad unto death, afraid and weary to the point of exhaustion? And going a stone's throw away from them, He knelt down, falling flat upon His face on the ground. A pleading voice sounded: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26 : 39). There was terror, and supplication in His tones.

Yes, He was changed—for now He was on His knees and had lost all semblance of control. "Father," rose that refrain; always the self same word and the same petition: "Father, all things are possible to Thee: remove this chalice from me!"

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In sorrow three Apostles who had seen Him glorious, resplendent and dazzling as snow on Mount Thabor, now beheld Him lying face downward on the earth. "What a lamentable posture!" (Bossuet).

This prostrate form could not be the Master. Well might the three, especially Peter, recall that day when Christ had taken him aside lovingly to relate to him what was to come to pass—Peter had protested and rebuked Him, saying: "Lord, be it far from thee, this shall not be unto thee!" (Matt. 16 : 22). No, Lord! Thee to be delivered, scourged, crucified! And the Master had replied in a loud voice: "Go behind me, Satan, thou art a scandal unto me: because thou savourest not the things that are of God, but the things that are of men" (Matt. 16 : 23).

And now behold this thing of God, a prostrate creature, praying, supplicating, imploring grace! "And I have a baptism wherewith I am to be

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baptized: and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?" (Luke 12 : 50).

Why with such ardor manifested in advance, fail so in courage when the moment arrives? The Apostles "slept for sorrow" (Luke 22 : 45). They too, sank to earth, exhausted. And He, rising up from His prayer, found them lost in slumber. A voice startled them; a hand was laid on them. "Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst thou not watch one hour?"

They opened their eyes. Before them He stood sorrowful. "Why sleep you? Arise, watch ye, and pray "

Was it a dream? They stammered; they had no words with which to reply, and they fell back heavily to earth. Jesus turned away discouraged, bereft of human help; and once more He fell on His face, moaning the petition that was wrung from Him by sadness, disappointment, and fear.

V

Agony

ONLY great souls can be heroic in solitude. Courage is often a flame lit by the presence of enemies or friends who censure or applaud. Fortitude in the face of death may be maintained when there are spectators and an appropriate setting. The man led to execution instinctively recoils from death and not infrequently controls himself only through fear of being thought afraid. This is another form of fear. No man who goes to death escapes that interior struggle to live. The dying, expiring on a bed of illness, are not exempt from this agony, often more cruel than death itself, which is, in fact, a deliverance.

The death agony rocks and tortures the soul, attacking it in every faculty; death forces an entrance, bathing the body in a cold sweat in this bitter and

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last fight when the instinct to live struggles with the fear of dissolution.

Even when death has apparently conquered, life retires into the far recesses of the soul, as to a last redoubt, and there clings on in those troubled depths, whence arises, as from Gethsemani, that same cry of distress and supplication: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass." The last agony is the fear of dying and sorrow at leaving life; it is the instinct that clutches and holds to the mortal ruin that to-day is called a body, to-morrow, a corpse.

Christ's agony was undoubtedly of this nature. Let us try to understand it as such without any attempt to palliate it, for in so doing we, who must agonize and die, would deprive ourselves, in the fear and darkness of death, of the strength and consolation of saying: *He* knew fear before me; I tremble, but *He* also trembled; I want to live, and *He* also clung to life.

How consoling it will be for you, poor soul at bay, to repeat with the

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last movement of your pale lips:
"Father, if thou wilt, remove this chalice from me: but yet not my will but thine be done." (Luke 22 : 42).
Fiat. Amen.

A whole world of meaning is comprised in those two words, more especially in the last one: 'Amen', 'So be it', 'The end of all', 'God wills it', Amen. Even so, glory to Him, to the Father, and to the Holy Ghost! My soul flickers to extinction, I am consumed; eternity is here. Amen. So be it!

Fear, then, is the dominating sentiment, fear of the end, of death. And what a terrifying end awaited Jesus! It was the dread of the execution that prostrated Him to earth; He, the Son of man, like unto us in flesh and blood. But His agony is our support and consolation: His bitter struggle between life that holds fast and death that battled to enter; bathing His body in a cold and bloody sweat that streamed from every pore.

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But this was not all. To it was added horror and fear of the justice of God about to fall on Him, the promised Victim, long-awaited and guarded tenderly, as it were, for this hour. Christ had bound Himself with sublime imprudence, to go security in this hour for all sinners, yes, for all men. The contract is sealed—He cannot escape—and now the time of settlement has come, that terrible day of reckoning when He must pay to the last farthing.

We shut our eyes and turn our thoughts from this tormenting truth, but of what avail? The day of reckoning shall come for us as it did for the Saviour. The consciousness of our manifold sins should keep this truth ever present before us. In witnessing the trials and sufferings of others, particularly of the just, we should ponder and say: How is it with me? What suffering awaits me? When will that dread hour strike for me, when I must render an account of my stewardship, and where shall I find the spiritual treasure with which to liquidate my

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debt? O God, the weight of divine justice lies heavy, too, on Thy creature!

But as if this were not enough to burst asunder the veins of His body and tear the fibers of the Heart of Jesus, a more crushing weight is added,—the clear and precise knowledge that His agony and death will not avail for all men. What refinement of suffering, to labor for naught, to descend to such depths in shame and blood for such meager results! The salvation of mankind would be secured, but only for the elect few; and by a stupendous mystery, even among these elect, there will be many who will owe their eternal happiness but to Christ's boundless mercy. Well might He ask: "What profit is there in my labor?" (Ps. 29 : 10).

Thus all forces worked together to overwhelm the Redeemer: the natural fear of death, the dread of suffering, the futility of the sublime effort to save the entire world, His inability to pay the debts of the human race save with His blood, the weight of shame that crushed

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Him before the court of heaven, the abandonment of the Apostles, and the growing distrust that was working in them—for Jesus read their thoughts, saw their astonishment, knew they were scandalized, and that they felt almost contempt for His weakness and fright—and heavier than all this to bear, was the anger of His Father, who would crush Him, and justly, to the earth.

He could not say that these sufferings were too great or unjust. No, they had to be. The martyrs were upheld by the consciousness of their innocence; Jesus was crushed by His full realization of what it meant to be charged, even though through love, with the foul deeds of men.

Verily, nothing could be added to this deep sea whose stormy waves rolled in from every direction, covering Him with the billows of measureless humiliation.

VI

The Silence of the Father

ALAS! This was but the entrance into the bitter sea of the Passion, where Jesus was to sink from humiliation to humiliation. His unspeakable discouragement would have lacked a special and refined pain, had it not been ordained that He must seek exterior help and be refused. He, the strong, the great, the Master, appealed for consolation to His Apostles—He is a broken reed that would lean on others.

In this garden swept by the terrible wind of God's inexorable justice, the Master and His Apostles lay prostrated; the Master extended His hands in supplication, but the Apostles were benumbed, devoid even of pity, save for themselves. He who had restored their courage and calmed their fears on the turbulent sea of Tiberias, now

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cowered before them, and by His attitude, His pallor, His trembling words, betrayed that emotion which humiliates a man in his own eyes and in the eyes of other men—fear.

The sight was a fresh shock to the Apostles, whose faith would, seemingly, now become as dull as their eyelids, as halting as their words. Losing of confidence in us always precedes the flight and abandonment of those upon whom we have a right to count, and who desert us because our companionship is no longer an honor, or because our friendship is a danger. This particular pang, like the other sufferings that caused Jesus the greatest pain, had been foretold by the prophets: "I sought among those about me, and I found no one." "I am become a reproach among all my enemies, and very much to my neighbors; . . . a fear to my acquaintance. They that saw me without fled from me. I am forgotten as one dead from the heart" (Ps. 30 : 12, 13).

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For indeed it is true that great souls must not behave as men, save at the cost of losing the esteem of men. True humility is incomprehensible to the majority.

When Jesus saw that human help had failed Him, He turned in desperation to heaven. For more than an hour He knocked at the door of God's heart with the word that hitherto had never failed to conquer; "*Father*, all things are possible to thee! If it be possible, *Father*." What sweet humility in this tenderest of words! But the Father remained deaf to the cry of His trembling Son. Tears and blood flowed, yet no help or pity came from on high. We all know such hours, and it was to comfort and sustain us that Jesus felt them also.

Since that night and that agony, what if the world rejects us and we seem abandoned by God? We have one great help and refuge in the cruel sufferings and abandonment of Christ, where our cry of distress will ever find an echo. Thou, my Saviour, at least

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Thou canst understand! "For we have not a high priest, who can not have compassion on our infirmities: but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin!" (Heb. 4 : 15). It is certain that God has always had *pity* on man, His supreme work; but since the time of Christ Our Lord, a new word designates the pity from on high that stoops to heal all wounds because He, Himself, has felt them. It is the word *compassion*! We have a God who feels, who bears our infirmities.

While our divine Saviour bared His Heart to the sword of sorrow in order that He might experience and compassionate men's sufferings, the heavens seemed to open, and a shaft of light pierced the night and fell upon this body in pain, this soul in agony. The Father had heard!

The Son lifted His head to look upon that august face, and to hear those words of comfort. He saw but an angel. More than this the Gospel does not tell us. Piety and mysticism have taxed their ingenuity to discover the

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person of this angel. Was it Michael or Gabriel? Surely it would only have been one of the highest of the celestial spirits. But we must be satisfied with the simple text—"and there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him" (Luke 22 : 43).

God did not speak; gone was the time when a voice from on high, gentle as the dove of baptism, mighty as the thunders on Mount Thabor and in the Temple; proclaimed: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3 : 17). In this hour of divine justice, there is no son, no God—only the sinner, the universal sinner.

Yet God sends even to the sinner the angel that was promised, but only an angel. And what does he do? He comforts, he has come to fortify and give courage. Jesus listened with bowed head and joined hands, grateful, for His need was sore.

Let us not seek to penetrate the mystery of that heavenly and divine interview, but on bended knees, gladden our hearts with it. Jesus received comfort

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from an angel, and it is for us to imitate Him in our hour of need. For whatever be his native or acquired force, there comes an hour, mayhap the supreme last hour, when man must seek help and strength. And God often permits this strength to come from one unknown or regarded lightly—in order that we may recognize our helplessness and weakness, and that, in our distress, we may turn to the source of all good, God Himself. “Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change, nor shadow of alteration” (James 1 :17).

In vain we plan our life and envisage our manner of dying, forgetting the ominous words, “I shall come like a thief in the night.” Like our agonizing Lord, we, too, shall seek and long for consolation. The suddenness of the last call, an unexpected absence, may find all whom we love at a distance, and our eyes may close on unknown faces. Like Jesus, we shall seek support in our supreme distress, and find

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only the hand of a stranger and the aid of the chance priest hurriedly called, when we had imagined quite another ending. Yet, let us bow our heads now and join our hands, accepting the consoling angel; thankful that in this we may be able to resemble our divine Master. Like Him, we shall gather our waning forces, and head up, go courageously to God!

VII

The Kiss of Betrayal

SUCH was the example given us by our Saviour. Not only did He accept humbly the strengthening words of the angel but promptly He rose to face His doom. The sounds of approaching steps, the clink of arms and the muffled hum of voices, broke the stillness; the flickering of the approaching torches dispelled the darkness of the garden. The Master approached His Apostles, struggling to consciousness from their heavy sleep: "Sleep ye now," He said sadly, "and take your rest." Then, with an energy that contrasted strongly with His weakness and anguish of a moment before, "The hour is come, and the Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go: behold he is at hand that will betray me." (Matt. 26 : 45, 46).

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For the garden and the road traversing it were invaded, and a man was seen approaching slightly in advance of the soldiers and servants. It was Judas! What must have been the state of his mind at that moment? Cynicism, hypocrisy, fear, possessed him. Did he, as some pious commentators affirm, wish to warn Jesus of the danger that threatened, and to impart the information hurriedly under the cover of a kiss? Did he think that Jesus would escape as He had so often done before? It is to be doubted, since he appeared, on the contrary, to have forestalled "the ruses and tricks of the Maker of Miracles" in ordering the prisoner to be surrounded and closely watched. Rather, the prey to passion, convinced that all flight was impossible, all delay useless, the Apostle who had sold his Master resolved to show himself for what he was. Rapidly and audaciously he advanced: "Hail, Master!" and kissed Jesus.

And the Master spoke to His traitor-apostle; the first words fraught with

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the delicacy of love: "Friend, whereto art thou come?" Then, in accents that betoken a heart wounded to death; "Judas, dost *thou* betray the Son of man with a kiss?" (Luke 22 : 48).

For God, who reads all hearts and for whom the past is as the present, had heard the words exchanged between Judas and the soldiers on their way to the Garden. Jesus was unknown to the men coming to arrest Him. They had asked: "What is He like in face and form? It will be dark, His disciples are numerous and it is said that one of them, James, resembles Him. What is the color of His garment? By what sign shall we know Him?" Judas had reassured them: "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he; lay hold on him, and lead him away carefully." (Mark 14 : 44). Ah, Judas, the seal of friendship, to be the sign!

The ingratitude of this betrayal produces wonder in one's soul! Such an action seems past belief. Then come the pains of realization and untold bitterness. He whom I have

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called, who shared My life and My confidence, he for whom I had reserved the highest dignity to which man can attain, My Apostle, a founder of My Church! From an enemy or from one indifferent to Me! But thou, Judas, My friend! Why hast thou done this thing?

Every sinner is an ingrate, but there are degrees of sinning. And when sinners are found among Jesus' friends? The gravity of sin is measured by matter and intention—but also by the signal graces and the infinite delicacy of the love so often betrayed and sold. All these iniquities were represented in the drama of the Passion, each sin having its own role to play. When, in the glare of the torches, surrounded by menials and soldiers, Jesus felt Judas' lips on His cheek, He accepted the embrace because in it He embraced all the secret and the public betrayals of His most cherished ones, His priests and religious. Judas was both priest and religious.

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The woof of the Passion was abandonment. Disaffection and betrayal enfolded Him in their sinister embrace. Upon this tragic background the physical sufferings and the humiliation of the Saviour were drawn in bloody strokes: but the supreme suffering was the rejection by His own—the rejection of Him who had loved so much, who gave only love!

Yet this expiation had to be. Nothing wounds the Heart of God like the abandonment of His creatures. How explain, otherwise, the complete and sudden desertion of the Apostles, if not by the stern necessity of divine justice? For scarcely had Jesus been seized and bound, when all, without exception, fled precipitously. Not one remained faithful.

Jesus had warned them of this. He had spoken of it to His disciples as the great temptation they must face: "Watch ye, and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14 : 38). This was the great

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trial of faith, and great indeed was the temptation. All the faith of the Apostles, laboriously developed in their hearts during the three years of Christ's public ministry, was at stake. The trial of their faith consisted precisely in this odious seizure of the Master in the dead of night, and of His submission and lack of power. And is this not the daily trial of our faith, especially in these days of quibbling and deceit, when God seems silent while the wicked prosper? Certainly it stretched one's powers of belief to see in this man bound, struck, betrayed with a kiss by one of His own, a God, the only and mighty God! And likewise is it a test of faith for the just to see failure crown their patience, while success pursues the sinner.

Jesus prepared His Apostles for this test by manifesting His weakness, His instability and anguish, to such a degree that the blood oozed from His pores in an agony of fear. He had wished His three best beloved to witness this

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terrible spectacle, but alas! the trial of faith was too strong even for them.

Few souls accept Jesus humiliated, few love Him bound, few adore Him crucified. Hence the Master repeats, "Watch and pray," and the Apostles, far from watching and praying, slept, and thus weakened themselves. Now see them flying through the valley of Josaphat, pursued by fear, and torn with doubt.

After all, who knew? The ancients were right perhaps! What could be said of a Being who allowed Himself to be seized in this manner and led forth bound as a malefactor? Even God the Father had no word for Him in this tragic moment. Had they been deceived? They fled, but found no cave dark enough to hide them. They sought refuge in the tombs, a fitting place to bury their faith and love. Except for the single Apostle found on Calvary, the youngest, not one dared show himself in the streets the next day. Those who later were to preach the supreme love of Christ on the Cross,

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witnessed His dying, only at a safe distance and even then the Crucified was hidden from their straining sight by the cloud of darkness that descended upon the entire earth during the three hours when Jesus hung on Golgotha.

What a pitiful ending to the three years of love, of teaching, of intimate and familiar life with Him! Three years of sweet heart-to-heart converse, and then—abandonment and flight! But when we remember that our own abandonment of Christ was represented in this cowardly desertion, our judgment will be less severe. Who has not, at times, experienced confusion of conscience, overthrow of will! Sincere protestations of fidelity have not been wanting in hours of fervor, when the fire of our love seemed so to consume us that we could imagine nothing that could separate us from our cherished Master. Lord, we have prayed, "Grant that sin may never tear us from Thy loving embrace"—and this cry of humility seemed to assure our victorious resistance.

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Then suddenly our soul, like another Gethsemani, was invaded; our passions were in disorderly riot, an army closing in with cords and chains, a spear that pierced, a sword that killed. "Whom seek ye?" Jesus, this same Jesus, who is present in our heart! Peter, James, John, Andrew, beloved and privileged ones, defend your Master! Chosen souls whom God has taken from Thabor to Thabor, souls of priests and religious, the hour has come; do battle for your Lord! But instead it is too often a rout. The will turns from God, it flees dismayed, it falls.

The first fall is followed by a second, and that by a third. The soul that climbed so high now sinks lower and lower, and like the Apostles, flees in complete disorder to the tombs wherein it would hide. And what does it encounter there? The Jesus whom it has betrayed—waiting with open arms to take it back and love it once more. "O fountain of everlasting love, what shall I say of Thee?" (Imitation, Book 3, 10).

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At the spot where Jesus was betrayed with a kiss, and where the flight of the Apostles began, the road passes through a waste and desolate scene marked only by a few stray olive trees. To the right between two walls, a path ends in a "cul-de-sac," and there on a slab in the wall, worn by time, two heads are engraved, the lips of one touching the cheek of the other. This is the only record of that shameful betrayal. Would that a sanctuary of expiation could be erected there!

The kiss of Judas has come down through the ages. It is still given, and Our Saviour, in accents no less acutely sorrowful repeats: "Dost thou betray the Son of man with a kiss?"

Let it be said of each one of us that he carries expiation in his heart. Let us kiss lovingly, secretly, the foot of the crucifix to make amends for the salutes of the Apostle who publicly betrayed Our Lord.

VIII

Denial, Thrice Over

AS the sorrowful Passion of Our Lord develops under our eyes, two sentiments take possession of our heart. The first is humility. "For if in the green wood they do such things, what shall be done in the dry?" This comparison should ever be present to our mind. The second is confidence. My sins have been washed away; the hardest part of the expiation has been accomplished. I have but to apply to my soul the price of that blood. I know where and how it can be done.

We cannot, however, do this without having the bitter consolation that we, too, were present to Jesus during His sufferings. We were present in the agonies of His Heart and the torture of His body. There will be no suffering in our lives that we cannot bring to the ocean of His Passion. The waves of

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our sorrows meet there like a sea, blood mingles with blood.

The memory of the Passion is as "a bundle of myrrh" that we have but to place in our bosoms to inhale its eternal perfume. Let us bury our face in this myrrh and bitter-sweet; occasions for doing so shall not be wanting. Love is born. And as Jesus goes forth desolate and abandoned, our faithful and compassionate love must accompany Him.

Jesus leaves His Apostles. All is over. The final separation is at hand. Bound and led by the soldiers, He ascended Mount Ophel while the Apostles scattered.

What a cruel solitude for the Saviour amid that rough crowd of men who led Him to His execution! What silence in His Heart in the midst of the tumult of the guards! Not one friend is present. Once more He is before us, for that same solitude of the heart which crushed the Saviour we all must experience at times in life, especially in old age. Let us then remember that

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there is another and a more terrifying solitude awaiting us in the Great Beyond, when we shall appear alone before God. Where then shall we seek refuge? To whom appeal? What friend will aid? Where shall we find help? All have vanished; all that supported us in life, even the companionship of the senses, has deserted us.

Oh, my soul, make friends to-day with your Judge! There is still time; to-morrow it may be too late!

PETER, who fled with the others, was seized with remorse and retraced his steps. He remembered his repeated promises of fidelity: "Although all should be scandalized in thee, I will never be scandalized" (Matt. 26:33). Urged by the sting of conscience he went back, following the procession at a distance. What were his feelings? Curiosity, perhaps; mingled with the desire to see how this would end. There was love, too, but it no longer had first place. Love that does not

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rule is soon dominated by other emotions. In Peter it had sunk to embers. Of such feeble sentiments is our fidelity made. We are as smoking flax—and yet God accepts us if we will allow Him to revive the flame. Alas! how often we contend against Him!

The lamentable episode of Peter's fall was a natural consequence of Peter's pride. Reaching the court of the high priest, he met another disciple at the door—and this man, knowing the portress, gained entrance for himself and his companion. The woman looked inquiringly at Peter, but he was occupied solely with the object for which he had come. The second disciple, being known to the high priest, gained access to the hall, but Peter remained with the servants and soldiers who were warming themselves before the fire, as they recounted the events of the day and the incidents of the evening. Peter was apparently an indifferent spectator—but then came the maid who had admitted them. As she saw

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Peter in the light of the fire she looked at him scrutinizingly:

"This man also was with Jesus the Galilean," she said.

"I know not what thou sayest," he exclaimed. He felt, however, that he could not keep up such denial, and withdrew toward the door. Two o'clock was striking, and the loud crowing of the cock fell on his ears. Another maid perceived him.

"This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth," she asserted.

And this time he denied with an oath, saying that he knew not the Man. Time passed. The buffeting of Jesus had begun. Jest after jest fell on the timid Apostle's ears; blows were struck, and loud guffaws followed. And after a little while they came that stood by:

"Surely thou also art one of them?" they said. "For even thy speech doth discover thee!"

Before this accusation a great fear consumed Peter's heart. He dare not

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admit that he had lied. So he burst forth into imprecations, explosions of wrath, cursing, and swearing that he knew not the Man.

And again the cock crew.

And the Lord, who was passing, turned and looked on Peter. Yes, at that moment Jesus emerged from the hall and crossed the court. At His glance Peter's soul was shaken to its depths. He went out, weeping bitterly, and to the end of his life his soul was shamed at the remembrance of that look from the Master he had denied.

A word from Jesus had failed to touch the heart of Judas: "Friend, whereto art thou come?" But one look from the Master melted Peter's heart. This instantaneous repentance was Jesus' only consolation during that night of suffering.

Let us pause a moment to contemplate Peter fleeing in the darkness, not knowing where he went, his soul in anguish, tears flowing from his eyes, sobs choking him as he repeated incessantly, "I know not the Man, I

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know not the Man!" Remorse compelled him to reiterate again and again the words that had wounded his dearly beloved Master.

At the same time let us also contemplate Jesus in that low room, clad in the garment of derision. In His Sacred Heart those words were echoing—those words of betrayal, "I know not the Man!" Never until Peter's dying day shall that cry cease to echo in Peter's heart. And it was present in Christ's Heart until He expired on the cross.

What caused Peter's fall? Was it the fact that he had exposed himself to temptation? No. That exposing of himself to danger was only incidental to a duty he owed to Christ. There are perils we must face, or know ourselves for cowards. Did he really love Christ? Ardently. Words never failed him to express his love. Why, then, did his conduct contradict his professions of fidelity? Because Peter did not know himself. Because the love of God in

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Peter did not have as its accompaniment, true contempt of self. Had he suspected his weakness or his cowardice he would never have entered the atrium.

WE are fain to believe ourselves stronger and better than we are. We have hypocritical excuses for all our lapses, and rashly expose ourselves often. Rarely does the sinner sin with deliberate malice. The proof of this is that he is able to excuse his conduct to himself and others. There are always sufficient reasons for this or that action; there are sure to be extenuating circumstances. And he is quick to find them.

Peter had desired to see how this affair would finish. Who can blame him? He forgot his weakness. He forgot that only a few hours previous he, like the others, had trembled with fear. It is true that he had turned in his flight and followed Jesus at a distance. Of all the Apostles he alone had returned. This gave him a secret feeling of superiority. Again he showed ignor-

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ance of self. He knew that he was in the midst of his Master's enemies, and so he felt that he must show cunning, must tread warily. But betray, deny his Lord? Impossible! Nevertheless, he did so. Fear, terror, and the secret enchantment of evil seized him, carried him on. Did he imagine that there slept in his heart, that heart that had made so many sincere professions of love, such an abominable, shameful betrayal? Peter did not know himself; Peter thought himself stronger than he was, and so the temptation overcame him.

What then of the sinner who plays with temptation? Can he hope to stand where Peter fell? "I am free; I know my duty, I know how far I can go; I can draw rein when I wish; I can permit myself one draught from the alluring cup". Unfortunate creature! Know you not, have you forgotten, that you put your lips to the cup at your own peril, that at the bottom of the cup from which you quench your thirst, lies intoxication? In the evil

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that is trifled with, in the indulgence of the senses, there is a call as imperious as that of hunger and thirst. To parley with a temptation is to succumb. To stand on the threshold of a temptation is to enter in. To enter in is to fall.

The Master said: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Hence it is the door that must be guarded. "Father, lead us not into temptation." Lead us away from this entrance, harmful and treacherous. Such was the Our Lord's supplication to His heavenly Father.

But the sinner's self-ignorance is such that he not only excuses himself for encountering the evil, but also, for having committed the sin. Conscience accuses him, recognizing his fault. Still he will continue to argue the question, alleging that he was unable to resist; that he struggled at first, but was on slippery ground; that the battle was too fierce; that, against his exhausted will, fresh troops were ever arriving, and finally, that the fight was

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unequal. Virtue can do nothing against numbers, he says.

Poor sinner! he is in the tragic situation of an unfortunate creature who, falling from a roof into space, hangs for an instant over the abyss, clinging to a sharp projection. His support gradually gives way; unable to climb back he closes his eyes and falls, crying: "It is my fate!"

This last cry accuses him. Since he knows the fatal abyss of vice, why fling himself into it? But he will declare, he did not know it, that he got entangled, that he lost his footing, was swept off his feet! Here is our great error! Peter was ignorant of his own heart, Peter was presumptuous. Under his good qualities welled up the secret springs of self-esteem; and this self-esteem, at the crucial moment overbore his love for Christ.

Peter did not know, had not sounded the depths of his nature. Do we know ourselves? God is aware of our hidden weakness. He sends certain trials. He allows us to fall that our eyes may be

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opened to the true condition of our souls. And only he who has a profound contempt for himself is capable of great things. When man ceases to love himself, when he lives for his fellow-creatures, then and only then, does he live for God.

Jesus destined Peter for great things. He desired that His Apostle love only Him and His Church; hence He permitted this pitiful fall, knowing that it would tear the veil from Peter's eyes, and lay bare to him his weakness. It would kill self-esteem, it would reveal to him his true nature. What we are in the secret recesses of our heart constitutes our worth.

Peter must be made to abhor self, to see the vanity of self-love, in order that one day he may say sincerely and repeat thrice: "Lord, Thou who knowest all, Thou knowest now that I love Thee!"

IX

Love Disdained

DESPITE all obstacles God works as He wills with souls. He brings good out of evil, and in so doing, manifests His supreme and divine power.

The tree which man plants produces fruit of its kind. Only God can bring life out of death and glory out of sin. Hence, a thorough knowledge of ourselves, a complete realization of our natures, of the weaknesses and faults that have caused our falls, will make us circumspect, humble, fearful of evil, and will give us, according to the words of the liturgy, (*Secret, in Mass of 1st Friday of Lent*), a readier continence, that is, a purity on the alert, as it were, a chastity that asserts itself even before the appearance of danger.

Peter in the future would be on his guard. He who was destined to com-

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mand, learned now humbly to submit to others. The letters he has left us are redolent of humility, condescension, and indulgence. Perhaps he had been too vehement, and the generous impetuosity which is his glory, had manifested itself in a brusqueness capable at times of touching an open wound too roughly. Henceforward it was with gentle, trembling hands and penitent tears he uplifted the fallen and bound their spiritual hurts.

During the last persecution, when the promised martyrdom was at hand, he doubted his own strength and fled along the Appian Way. That terrible night in the atrium, that importuning woman, the bantering soldiers, the crowing of the cock, his awful blasphemy and denial—all these were present to his mind. “I know not this Man of whom you speak.”

But the Master arrested that flight, warning him that the hour of his great test had struck. Filled with fresh courage he turned back; but so great was his contempt for himself, that his

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last action, his last attitude, and his last words were those of humility and penitence. He asked to be crucified head downward, his head toward the ground where it belonged, in the dust. "I say to you, that he who humiliates himself shall be exalted," and surely the angels must have clustered around that agonizing and venerable Apostle, as he hung there, his limbs stretched and fastened, his gray head in the dust of the earth.

THOU art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church!"

Peter knew what he was expiating by his sufferings, and regarded all that befell him as a merited chastisement. He guarded jealously the purity of suffering. So, in accepting our crosses as a punishment that is our due, we also shall escape the peril of vain glory, which is apt to attach itself to even such paltry miseries as we are able to support. In placing ourselves downward on the cross, acknowledging that we are not worthy to lift our

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heads, charged as they are with sins, we suffer humbly—humbly but intensely, unconscious that in this lowly posture we are gazing directly into the face of heaven. Suffering, safeguarded and purified, becomes the glory of our life. We do not realize it, perhaps, but such are the triumphs of God, to which a self-seeking world is blind.

Peter, as he fled dismayed through the vale of Cedron, did not regard his profound desolation as a glory. But Jesus, from the room where He spent half the night in humiliating suffering, followed His Apostle in thought, and closed the bleeding wound where the germ of humility, being planted, came to life, bearing fruit.

But Jesus also followed another man rushing madly across the same valley of Cedron. It was Judas. This man, too, carried an open wound in his heart, deep enough to bring forth a rich harvest of humility. Even as Peter rushed from the atrium, so he rushed from the Temple after flinging down the thirty pieces of silver. Moreover, he

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had publicly confessed his crime. "I have betrayed the blood of a just Man! I have sinned," he cried. The avowal was complete, yet he fled with dry eyes, screaming in his pain—too hardened for the sweet tears of love and repentance.

So long, so long his soul had been a barren waste, and now no water could spring forth from it, even under the pressure of profound and humiliating sorrow! He despaired. He thought only of himself, and of the shame that should be attached to him until the end of time. His very name, Judas, was to be the supremest insult that could be flung at a man. It rang already in his ears. During that time Peter also heard pulsing in his brain, the word: "Renegade! Renegade!" Both epithets are equally odious! Peter blushed for shame, he cried aloud in his sorrow. But he accepted the shame; he bowed his head and wept, forgetful of himself. He did not dwell on the possible loss of the glorious choice Jesus had made of him as the Leader, the Founda-

tion. Only one idea crushed him:—he had betrayed ineffable love.

“*Filioli mei carissimi*—my beloved little ones,” he will say, when explaining in his declining years the doctrine and life of his Master. “God the Saviour was kissed and betrayed by one of His Apostles. He was denied by another—and that other is I, PETER! Ah! who can be sure of himself? I say to you, my brethren, watch. Be ever on your guard against the evil that prowls about, waiting to devour you.”

Peter accepted his humiliation. Until the end of time the Foundation Stone of the Church shall repose upon the betrayed and disowned Master.

“And going out, he wept bitterly.” Those tears were the tears of humility. Until the end of his life, they flowed unceasingly like a spring of water that gushes forth from a fissure amid the lava and crumbling substance of a volcano in eruption. This spring is to feed the Church through all time. The soul that weeps is the rock that opens, and particles of earth remain hidden in

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the fissure, where the germ of love shall be fructified by tears.

The soul that loves and sins, weeps because she loves. Judas, loving only himself, could not weep, even though he had become an object despised in his own eyes. Hence only one thing remained—to do away with that contemptible self, that being with which he would no longer live, and thus efface his name from the memory of men. Such thoughts thronged into his mind as he stumbled headlong, across the torrent of the Cedron and through the tombs, bruising himself against the stones of the dead. Maddened with shame, he struck his breast; horror had seized upon his entrails, yet in his heart there was no love, no repentance—and the end is known. The unhappy man, trying to flee forever from the Master he had kissed and betrayed, fell into the arms of eternal and avenging justice. “And he indeed hath possessed a field of the reward of iniquity, and being hanged, burst asunder

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in the midst; and all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1 : 18).

Yet, had he sought pardon, he, like Peter, would have been forgiven, and his sin obliterated from God's memory. There was still a place on the Master's cheek for the kiss of reconciliation, effacing the one of betrayal, and Jesus would have accepted it.

The tears in Christ's eyes, at that terrible dawn in the hall of Caiphas, were not alone for His own sufferings, but for the vision in the distance—a lonely field at the foot of the Mount of Scandal; a swaying tree, and hanging from it the body of His Apostle. Yes, and the knowledge that from that accursed spot His love, flung back at Him, was for the first time powerless to save, because it was disdained.

With these two wounds in His Heart, Jesus was to climb Calvary. That Heart of His was already open and bleeding. The centurion's lance pierced it, but Peter, and especially Judas, had already plunged the knife into living flesh.

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Prayer to the Open Heart of Jesus

LORD, if this Heart which I have pierced, denying and betraying Thee, is open, it is that an inexhaustible flood of love and pardon may flow from it. From fear of Thy justice, from reproach of conscience, and in contempt of myself, I have sought a hiding place within it, as within a mountain where I may bury my shame and my fright.

Heart of Jesus, opened for love of us, Heart of boundless depth, in the abyss of Thy wounds, I seek shelter. Like a grain of sand thrown into the ocean, I lose myself in Thy precious blood.

Oh! Eternal Justice, seek me not. I am lost in the bosom of Eternal Mercy. Amen.

X

The Mockery of Justice

THE soul that suffers seeks solitude. Absorbed in itself it is oblivious of all that goes on without.

In the depths of Christ's wounded Heart, strange dialogues took place; poignant scenes were enacted, and a cross-fire of words varied the sorrowful refrain: "Thou, Judas . . . with a kiss!" and then, "I know not the Man!" The brutal betrayal by Judas, the cowardly denial by Peter, these meant absorbing grief for the Saviour. And the Church also, a continuation of Christ as is the Christian, must suffer these two betrayals.

Since the infliction of these two wounds Jesus had relapsed into silence. In silence He had crossed the Pretorium; and before the court that was to try Him, He displayed the same impenetrable silence.

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The natural impulse of one accused wrongfully is to refuse to speak before an unjust judge. Man innately possesses such a love of justice, such an abiding faith in fair dealing, that he places it in regions far above the influence of passion. When, then, justice fails in its supreme duty, and is swayed by prejudice or partiality, he feels that the universe is crumbling.

It is painful enough, indeed, to witness the condemnation and punishment of a human being whose guilt is proven, but it outrages every noble sentiment to behold him the victim of hatred, prejudice, and injustice on the part of his judge. This betrayal of justice, this disillusionment, Jesus suffered when surrounded by hirelings, who bore the same flickering torches with which they had sought Him in the Garden of Gethsemani. But especially did He suffer thus in the presence of Annas the high priest.

One wonders why the prisoner was brought before Annas, for the post was now occupied by Joseph Caiphas, his

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son-in-law. But though the Romans had deposed him and put Caiphas in authority, for the Jews, Annas remained ever their great, traditional high priest. Like all who have lost power and splendor, they seized upon every event and occasion to recall their dying glory. Jesus was brought before Annas as a protest against existing conditions. The whole proceeding was puerile, but flattering to the ancient judge, and a sweet satisfaction to his jealous ambition. Annas cherished the illusion that he governed through his son-in-law, whose appointment he had secured. He beheld in Jesus a dangerous rival of the old and now tottering priesthood. Their loss of prestige was keenly felt by the Jews. To the minds of the Jewish populace it meant an exercise of their rights to put the trial of Jesus under Annas' patronage.

Jesus understood their motives and felt the odium of the proceeding, and before He retired into that marvelous period of silence, He made it clear to

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them that He had not been duped. Thus, at the first interrogation, He replied with dignity, designed to show that He was neither a common conspirator nor an obscure tribal agitator.

The judge began by questioning Him upon His doctrine and His disciples, as though these were the sole charges at issue.

“I have spoken openly to the world: I have always taught in the Synagogue and in the Temple, whither all the Jews resort. And in secret I have spoken nothing. Why askest thou me? Ask them who have heard what I have spoken unto them: behold they know what things I have said.”

The challenge was answered with a cruel blow.

“If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil,” said Jesus, “but if well, why strikest thou me?”

No answer could be given to this. That blow indicated the smothered hatred and ill-disguised venom that had taken possession of the judges in this hurriedly convoked assembly. The

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Prisoner had ceased to be one accused; He had no chance for His life, but was already a man condemned.

Jesus then became silent. Why speak before judges who are not judges, but executioners?

Annas also realized the futility of further proceedings. He hurried Jesus off to Joseph Caiphas, whose house stood directly opposite. There was only a large flagged court to cross, where the troops warmed themselves at the fire; it was the court where Peter made his first cowardly denial. Jesus was dragged along at a rapid pace, lost amid the troop of soldiers that surrounded Him.

Caiphas' court was crowded. Twenty-three judges, the minimum number required by law, were presiding at one end, and at the other was gathered a sordid crowd of paid witnesses. The Accused was stationed in the center of the hall, between these two forbidding groups of men. His white figure, noble and commanding, stood out like a light in that somber, evil gathering. Before Him were the judges and behind He

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heard the confused murmur of the mob.

The interrogation this time was conducted in due legal form, every detail having been rehearsed, every precaution having been taken in advance. The secretaries were there, as well as the paid witnesses, gathered from no one knows where. Every eventuality had been provided for, save one, namely, Jesus' silence.

No questioning could open the lips that just pride had closed. The blood was still tingling in His face from the blow He had received, and He knew but too well with whom He had to deal. His silence exasperated His judges, because it destroyed the effect they intended to produce, and brought all their well-laid plans to naught. For how entrap this man through His own avowals, if He obstinately refused to speak? Christ's silence fell upon them like a pall. To offset it all began to speak at once; judges, priests, and witnesses. Jesus alone did not utter a sound, and awed the assembly by His muteness.

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WHEN, in our own life, calumny and injustice seem to wreck our existence, let us at least intrench ourselves in the dignity of silence. God hears all; He sees our hearts; let that suffice. "In silence and in hope shall your strength be." (Isa. 30 : 15).

Your strength, O soul disheartened and betrayed, lies in silence, not in justification, and in your trust in God, who is ever mindful of the oppression suffered for His sake.

Exasperated at length, beyond endurance, Caiphas sprang up from his bench into the hall, and approaching Jesus cried out: "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the blessed God? . . . I adjure thee by the living God to tell us if thou be the Christ."

"Thou hast said it, I am," answered Jesus.

A moment of stupor—then a great clamor of rage and protest followed. The maddened rabble fell upon Jesus, belaboring Him with blows, and drove Him out as a noxious object. "He hath

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blasphemed! He hath blasphemed!" said the high priest; and to the accompaniment of this cry He was dragged through the court, where He passed the soldiers, comfortably warming themselves, and heard Peter's final denial, followed by the crowing of the cock.

Then they threw Him into prison, to await the conclusion of His trial. Despite the incriminating avowal with which He was charged, a confession wrung from Him in the night at an illegal sitting had no force before the law, be its pomp and ceremony never so impressive. At the break of day they returned to the charge. The court was convened in great haste, though the setting was much the same as on the previous night. Witnesses, however, were not called, for now they had no need of them.

Jesus was led in, again to be questioned and subjected to fresh outrages. This farce of justice, this array of judges, this going from court to court was an insult, a bitter outrage to His

dignity. This care for the strict observance of the law at the moment when it was about to be violated with unspeakable effrontery, was a distinguishing feature that shall be reproduced in the cause of all the martyrs of Christ.

Dragged before Annas to satisfy an old man's ambition; dragged before Caiphas, the first time, in the hope that, taken by surprise and with the aid of bought witnesses, damaging evidence might be obtained against Him; dragged before Caiphas a second time to hear the officially pronounced sentence of condemnation, that the court had long since privately decided on; all these ignoble proceedings would have revolted Jesus had He not known that thus He could expiate all human injustice. He saw in the future His Apostles, His faithful, His friends dragged from bar to bar of justice, from Pretorium to Pretorium. He knew that in a higher degree He merited for us that security and confidence of which we stand in need,

when sin after sin drags us before the tribunal of penance in the presence of His priest—to go forth, not condemned, but absolved and delivered through His silence and resignation before the unjust sentence pronounced against Him.

And when the morning was come the scene was repeated before the scribes and the whole council, and they brought Him in.

“If Thou be Christ, tell us,” they exclaimed, exasperated by the impassiveness of the accused.

“If I tell you, you will not believe Me. And if I also shall ask you, you will not answer Me nor let Me go. But hereafter the Son of man shall be sitting on the right hand of the power of God.”

“Art Thou then the Son of God?”

“You say that I am.”

This admission was all they wanted; here, to them, was proof positive of His guilt. But for us, it is the foundation upon which rests our hope and faith.

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Jesus died because He affirmed that He is God.

Never man, a mere man, were he "the greatest genius, the most captivating savant, the most lyric, the most ideal of men" (Renan)—for all this is said of Christ, so as not to call Him God—never would a man have committed the folly of uttering those words. Abandoned by His own, betrayed, denied, and without hope of seeing His work continued; yes, at the very moment when all hope, help, and support are crumbling, twice in the face of death He affirms: I AM THE SON OF GOD.

Either this affirmation is true, or it is false. If false, then the pitiful object in that court was a lunatic, or a man suffering from hallucination. Such people are placed under restraint, or pitied as harmless fools. They are never executed. To say that He is God, would harm no one, if it were false; but if it be true?

Christ's past, filled with miracles and prodigies; the doctrine He had

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taught, pure and elevated; His calm and inexplicable silence—these were sufficiently weighty to give pause, to compel a fair trial for Him. But after a few hours of deliberation in the dead of night, His case was finished. The most elementary rules of equity demanded fair trial, were there question of an ordinary law-breaker. But if He is GOD?

Hence I say to all those who are oppressors, to those scribes and priests, and ancients of the people, and still more to all unjust judges, tyrants and rulers, “one day thou shalt see the Son of man coming in the clouds in His majesty, midst the roar of thunder and blaze of lightning. Thou shalt see Him whom thou hast judged, and thou shalt in turn be judged by thy condemned God, for all eternity.”

XI

Fickle Sons of Men

UNTIL that great last day Jesus kept an impenetrable silence. Let us enter into this silence of Our Saviour, so profound and full of meaning, at once awe-inspiring and consoling. Each virtue which Christ displayed in the Passion is like a mystic temple—and one enters into the courts thereof through a low door. But, as one advances, the temple is enlarged, the naves lengthen and the dim light enhances its solemn beauty. The soul loses itself in the glory of the courts of God.

What dignity in silence! What strength in that virtue which all souls must cultivate who are striving for perfection! Silence about ourselves, about those dear to us, about our past, our present, our virtues, our faults; silence

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upon all the details of our life;—perfect silence is the slow elimination of self. Nothingness guards silence. Nothingness makes no sound. To efface one's self is to be passed by. Obscurity is never molested.

Ah, if it be true that so much light is needed to speak wisely, how far greater is the need of such light if we would guard our silence. Lowered eyes, closed lips are double doors. They shut in the loved One who dwells in our hearts, alone with us, and we with Him. True love knows how to be alone with the object of its affection even in a crowd—but, by preference, it flees to the desert, which that dear presence transforms into a fertile land of promise. Solitude and silence break down the last barriers between two souls that love.

From the moment Jesus left the court of Caiphas and faced the people for the first time, His silence deepened. We follow the silent figure through that boisterous, malevolent crowd. What harm had He done to those who now

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surged so angrily about Him? Why did they hate Him? So short a while before these same streets had resounded with shouts of joy; palm branches and rich vestments had been strewn upon the ground that His feet might press them; hosannas had greeted Him; and as He passed through the Golden Gate, uplifted arms and waving branches had formed a triumphal arch above His head.

But the crowd, on this day, had no soul. It was swayed from without. There were many winds to agitate this restless sea of revengeful humanity, whipping it into waves of fury, thirsting for revenge. Their hatred for the priests, their envy of the ancients, their fear of the Sanhedrin, act upon this maddened mass; Satan's foul breath excites it, and the breath of the anger of God.

The law of the mob is a strange but uncontrovertible fact. Men lose their reasoning powers in proportion to their numbers. A crowd composed of intelligent individuals degenerates into

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a blind mass. A moment since they were men—this mass that is now but a huge child, fickle, changing, irritable, passing from laughter to tears, shouting in the same breath, "Hosanna!" and "Away with Him!"—capricious alike in its hatred and its pity.

Jesus passed through this throng composed of His own creatures—a mob destined to be one of the principal and most painful instruments of His Passion. The people are seldom considered as more than the background of the picture, but, like thunder clouds massing slowly and finally obscuring the horizon, they gathered in strength and numbers from the tribunal of Caiphas to Calvary's summit. Through this crowd Jesus was compelled to pass.

Christ's first encounter with mob law occurred when the herd of mercenaries came to arrest Him. When they seized Him under cover of night, they hesitated, as men unaccustomed to their task. Later this attitude changed into the brutality of the hardened conscience that has nothing more to fear.

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The hirelings were soon reinforced with soldiers and paid witnesses. Add to them the priests whom we have seen at work, and you already have a crowd.

But Jesus' real contact' with the populace took place in the morning as He emerged from the court of Caiphas. Day was breaking, the streets were deserted, save for the early risers, servants, and vendors of food, and some of the many strangers who filled the city to overflowing at the Paschal time. At first sight, for the common people as for the stranger, this Man, forcibly dragged to the Antonia from the Pretorium, was some night malefactor taken red-handed, and as such He would have commanded scant attention, had it not been for the presence of the cursing, wine-flushed soldiers, and more especially of the cortège headed by Caiphas, the priests, the ancients, all the Sanhedrin. Men stopped to whisper, to question, "Who is it?"

"Jesus of Nazareth, the famous prophet!" Jesus of Nazareth! He

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it is! Pale, bedraggled, disfigured, tightly bound!

As the news spread, a fresh crowd gathered. This second mob that Jesus encountered was denser, for astonishment had succeeded curiosity. A dull murmur betrayed its irritation. It was said that He had tried to deliver the people to the Romans; He had been judged by the priests as a maker of magic, a disturber of the peace, a man who, through His spells and charms, could rob them of their last vestige of liberty; a scoffer, a blasphemer. The tide gathered strength as it rose, fed by the worst element among the people.

And yet, what will men not do, not sacrifice for the deceptive popularity of the crowd? Its applause has ensnared many to entire forgetfulness of the reality that God's approval is all that counts, that what we are in His sight alone matters.

Jesus keenly felt the shame and humiliation of being dragged through the streets bound and guarded by soldiers. Owing to the earliness of the

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hour, the traffic of the day had not yet begun. That deep suffering came later when, leaving Herod's court, He, clothed in the white robe of derision, appeared in the tumultuous streets and heard the titters of laughter and mocking words flung at Him as He passed. He was treated as a degraded, dangerous outlaw. His honor, His dignity, His pure doctrine, His resplendent past, were all engulfed in the stream of jeers and hisses.

Crowds, like children, love ridicule; they delight in the grotesque play which invites ready laughter. All refinement of feeling is lost, as the liquid notes of a lyre are drowned in the noise of drums. What object more ludicrous than the Wonder-Worker in His white robe, pulled here and there, the plaything of the mob? Stumbling, swaying, He goes without a vestige of that bearing which wins the people and commands respect.

Scripture does not relate what precise insults were thrown at Jesus; but knowing the cruel taunting of the mob

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on Calvary, it is easy to conjecture that the pleasantries that greeted Him were tinged with blood. (Bossuet, Third Sermon on the Passion.)

“Hosanna to the Son of David!” they cried. “Hail to him who comes in the name of the Lord!” These words, shouted in jubilation only a few days before, and still fresh in the memory of all, became cruel jibes. “Behold one greater than Solomon!” they exclaimed, alluding to what Christ had said of Himself; and, bending obsequiously, “Homage to the Son of God, the Messias!” They seized the easiest point, exploiting it at the right moment. Many of them had been present at the night trial, and derisively repeated Pilate’s interrogation of Jesus. Everything lent itself to this mockery. The rude laughter of the troops, the sneers of a mocking and debauched prince in Herod’s court rang in their ears. Irony and sarcasm came easily to their lips.

They were hurrying to the show in the Pretorium and the courtyard, their

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numbers augmented as they pressed on, eager for amusement and a chance to see the fun. They would jeer when Christ writhed under the lash of the flagellation, as a worm trodden under foot, they would mock when the thorn-crowned Victim was solemnly exhibited before them. Moreover, the white robe was but the preparation for the scarlet garment—and now the wildest passions were given free play. Christ was thrown like a dry branch into the seething whirlpool of the people. He was sucked down in the contempt of the populace to His doom. And a yet greater humiliation was His than the contempt of the crowd—He was to fall in the esteem of those He loved.

Humanly speaking, to be despised by a swarming mass that does not know you, and that you do not know, is a wounding thing to pride. But to be hooted and mocked by the very people who knew Him and had clamored to crown Him king! To pass, covered with mud, soiled with the dregs

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of wine, through this crowd of Galileans, His compatriots who had come for the Paschal feast! To see Himself dishonored, not only in the eyes of His frightened disciples, but in those of a scandalized people! To assist, as it were, at His own degradation—this refined, this bitter suffering imposed by divine justice pierced the Heart of Jesus to the core.

SHOULD such humiliation come upon us, let us not turn away from the knife that is plunged into our hearts; but welcome the wound, such a wound as our beloved Saviour has borne before us. For few are the chosen souls, few are the witnesses of Christ who have not felt the sword of humiliation in their hearts. There are many who follow the Saviour closely, seeking occasions to crucify their pride, their natural yearning, that they may share His ignominy. Such, for example, were St. Ignatius, humiliating himself at the feet of a priest, exposing his faults to one who knew him; Lacordaire, un-

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bosoming himself of humiliating and superfluous details that filled him with shame, that he might fall in the esteem of his confessor, and so the better imitate Jesus.

Once let the soul taste such contempt as Jesus suffered, and nothing can hold her back from following after the Beloved who has gone before, clad in the scarlet robe of humiliation.

The entry of the crowd into this drama changed the whole scene. The crowd could not be ignored; at times it became the principal actor. Pilate parleyed with it as with a powerful witness. From insults hurled at Christ, it passed to insolent demands for His life. Its threats and vociferations were deciding factors; they tipped the balance, and when, in spite of all accusations, this balance seemed to incline toward Jesus, Barabbas was thrown in. "Barabbas! Give us Barabbas! Away with this Man! Crucify Him!" Nor was this enough; the scales mounted higher; the fear of Caesar was added. "If thou release this man, thou art not

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Caesar's friend," was shouted at Pilate. This time the scale descended—and Jesus, following every movement of this riotous manifestation, heard His name in every mouth, saw Himself rejected by all.

And so the crowd played its rôle all the way up to Calvary. In the darkness and confusion of that desolate summit, it dwindled down to the people who wagged their heads in passing, the priests who mocked, and the soldiers who gambled away Christ's garments. Some were drinking, others were laughing. The holy women wept. John was overwhelmed with grief. Mary stood at the cross. And Jesus murmured: "Father, forgive them!" The two thieves blasphemed. Darkness fell upon this shifting scene. From above God was disentangling all the threads, separating the chaff from the wheat. He already saw the centurion on his knees. He heard the confession of the good thief who implored the dying Christ for salvation. He saves some, He rejects others.

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Has the world changed since then?
Have the just ceased to come in contact with the wicked? Has God failed to choose and take to Himself His elect?

XII

The Weakness of Power

THE character of Judas is revolting; the rôle of Caiphas repugnant; that of Peter, painful. But Pilate is a sorry figure, dominating the most complex scene the Pretorium had ever witnessed.

The trial of Jesus furnished the tragic feature in the great drama of the Passion. The stage was set. Judas had carefully laid his plans; Annas and Caiphas had rehearsed their rôles, and when Jesus appeared before them He was already a man condemned. Their show of justice was a cowardly farce. The sentence had been decided on and the trial was naught but a pretext for passing it (E. Renan, *Life of Jesus*, 21).

Peter's betrayal was not deliberate, but his defense of his Master lacked courage, and at the first word of a woman, he denied Him. Pilate alone,

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in the conflict of passions and interests, sought sincerely to save Jesus from the punishment he was asked to inflict upon Him.

The pitiful feature of Pilate's character was his lack of will-power. He wavered—recoiled at condemning an innocent man—and sent Him to death while proclaiming His innocence.

Fear, weakness and human respect can, under pressure, stifle the noblest of sentiments. What sadder thing than this desertion of principle. Open hatred, evil intent are preferable. The results are the same, but the latter at least are consistent, and have willed the result honestly.

Pilate condemning Jesus represents the eternal conflict between duty and self-interest, and that is the bitterest struggle known to the human heart. The figure of Pilate is self-interest supreme, contending with conscience as he passes through that conflict known to every soul as the battle between the two forces of duty and passion. Above all, Pilate was annoyed

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at his position. The first instinct of those ambitious ones who seek honor and authority is to avoid annoyance or disturbing complications. The administrative ability of many men in power often amounts to little more than a certain dexterity in avoiding difficulty, or in finding an avenue of escape from it, leaving others to bear complaint or blame. Such was the Pilate who tried Jesus early that morning. He had been informed that the Man would be brought before him, and Jesus was not unknown to the procurator, since His exploits were in every mouth. He knew, moreover, with the watchfulness of a governor, that this Man had broken no essential law.

Pilate wanted to avoid being brought in direct contact with the Jews because they were already unfriendly toward him. His unpopularity was of long standing (Fouard's *Life of Jesus Christ*, Book II, Ch. 1). From the moment he took office, he, like all tyrants, had wished to exercise absolute authority, and with this end in view he had at-

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tempted to install a Roman garrison in Jerusalem. Under cover of the night the troops entered the city, and great excitement prevailed the following day when the news spread. The town was up in arms, and people hastened en masse to the procurator in Caesarea to demand the withdrawal of the regiment whose presence was an insult. Pilate refused. The Jews were obdurate, and for five days reiterated their demands. Angered and out of patience, Pilate ordered the troops to charge the recalcitrants, who, flinging themselves on the ground, cried: "Trample upon our bodies, if you will, but we will not relinquish one atom of our rights!" Pilate gave way, and in such manner his term of office was inaugurated.

Dissatisfied with himself, resentful of the attitude of the Jews, he shortly afterward made a second attempt to impose his authority. This time the bone of contention was the gilt shields, bearing the names of pagan divinities, that he had hung on the walls of his palace, adjacent to the Temple. Fresh

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outbreaks followed; the people, again in fermentation, demanded the removal of the pagan ensigns. Pilate ordered the crowd to be dispersed. Silenced, but not vanquished, the indignant population appealed to Tiberius, and the Roman governor was forced to yield a second time. Decidedly, he was lacking in tact, and ran the risk of falling out of favor in high quarters.

As is common with weak characters, he now tried to conciliate.

Jerusalem lacked water, and he conceived the idea of bringing it to the city by means of gigantic aqueducts. The work was about to begin, when it was noised abroad that the revenue of the Temple was to be drawn upon to meet the expenses of construction. The people again rioted, and overpowered the workmen. The work was stopped, and a third time Pilate had to give way to the populace.

These things indicate the character of the man. Unstable in impulse as in conduct, his first move was to impose his authority; the second, to conciliate.

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Before obstacles that thwarted his designs, obstinacy met obstinacy, and stubbornness became violence. Suddenly the menacing shadow of Tiberius appeared upon the horizon. All felt that should the emperor again be obliged to interfere, it would be all over with the tactless procurator who thus disturbed the tranquillity of his distant lord. So it was that when the crowd threatened, Pilate yielded and delivered Jesus.

Since his three unfortunate quarrels, he had kept free from all conflict with this stiff-necked people, who clung obstinately to their own laws and their own God. He had returned to Caesarea in the fair vale of Sharon, rich with blossoming orange groves and waving fields of golden grain. Life there was to his taste, and he made of his estate a royal domain. Once a year only, for the Paschal feast, did he appear in Jerusalem, and then remained shut up in the Antonia, where he held court with all the pomp of military power, designed to impress the people. In

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reality his authority, as his presence, was only tolerated; he was never accepted.

And, by a strange fatality, it was during one of these brief periods of residence, on the eve of the great Paschal feast, that the conflict with the people which he desired to avoid was thrust upon him through the presence of Jesus.

To be disturbed that morning, just before the Jewish Paschal feast, was a trial to his patience, and his irritation deepened upon learning that the Jews would not enter the Pretorium and be soiled by the presence of a pagan, even though he were a procurator. It was against their law. An infringement of it would exclude them from accomplishing that night their sacred rite, the eating of the Paschal lamb. This impertinence served but to increase Pilate's resentment. But he yielded, as before. Why resist? This people, prostrate on the ground, inviting the troops to march over their bodies, and the pagan shields removed by order of

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Tiberius, were memories that still haunted him. So he came out to them, demanding angrily, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"

The Jews, scenting his ill-disguised rage, replied insolently, "If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up to thee!"

"Take Him, you, and judge Him according to your law," Pilate retorted. The note of bitterness in his voice recalled the past.

Here we have the first Pilate. And he still exists in this world. We have encountered Pilate within ourselves, and in our dealings with others. We seek ease and tranquillity; we are loath to be disturbed, even by God. When difficulties arise in our business affairs, our career, or our duties, we evade them; perhaps, alas, seek a way out that leads us and those near us into wrong-doing. It is hard to love God above our natural desires, especially in what touches our hearts and the things of our world.

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Yet, despite protests, Pilate saw himself forced to give audience to this tiresome prisoner. Jesus, humiliated beyond measure, stood outside, guarded by soldiers. Pilate had Him brought in, having just had time enough to gather the principal charges against Him. "We have found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he is Christ the king." (Luke 23 : 2).

The judge waved aside the first two accusations, knowing well that they were false. The province was calm, and the tribute had been paid. Upon the third charge alone did he question the prisoner, asking half-mockingly, half-angrily: "Art Thou the King of the Jews?"

The contrast between the crime of which He was accused, the assumption of royalty, and this pitiful object at the bar of justice, evoked a smile of irony, that played on the lips of the procurator.

And Jesus replied: "Sayest thou
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this thing of thyself, or have others told it thee of me?"

"Am I a Jew?" Pilate retorted. "Thy own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee up to me. What hast Thou done?"

Then Jesus affirmed His royalty: He also had His servants, but His kingdom was not of this world. He laid claim to His title, to His rights, and the existence of another world with its court, its army. There He reigns.

"Art Thou a king then?" insisted Pilate.

"Thou sayest that I am a King," replied Jesus. "For this was I born, and for this came I into the world . . . that I should give testimony of the truth."

"Truth," replies the sceptic, Pilate; "what is truth?" And with these words he went out again to the Jews, satisfied that he had to do with a mystic, a man suffering from hallucinations, anything except a criminal. To the priests who stood quivering with

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excitement at the door, he announced: "I find no cause in this Man." It was a simple sentence, stated in all sincerity, and with secret satisfaction. Pilate was not sorry, in fact, to show these Jews who had disturbed him that they could not impose on him with the flimsiness of their accusations. To Pilate's mind, the incident was closed. Not proven—no ground for criminal proceedings. How, therefore, condemn Him?

XIII

The Expediency of Authority

PILATE'S words, falling upon the ominous silence of the priests, who were impatient for Christ's blood, called forth a howl of protestation. It troubled the self-indulgent procurator. The sight of Jesus emerging from the court raised a hue and cry from the excited people. That dense and vociferating crowd, that dark and threatening mass at the end of the square, shouting threats and protests, gave indubitable evidence of its hatred. Pilate could have fancied himself once more in his troubled days. In this affair he thought to deal with a single class, the priests; instead, he found himself face to face with the people who detested him.

The wave of furious accusations reached his ears. Looking down upon the shouting crowd, Pilate was troubled

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as he measured the full significance of its savage mood. For peace's sake, turning to Jesus he said, not without a certain inquietude, "Dost Thou not hear how great testimonies they allege against Thee? Answerest Thou nothing?" Jesus made no reply, but persisted in His silence, a course that had astounded the judges, and awakened suspicion that there was something abnormal, something perhaps superhuman in this strange Being.

And now appeared the second Pilate, who at any price wished to free himself of this complicated affair, and yet at the same time not to deliver Jesus. For it had suddenly assumed large proportions, was fast developing into tumult. A way out of it must be found, some avenue of escape. To throw the Man he had proclaimed innocent, to the fury of the crowd, was an act against his conscience. He was considering the problem, when suddenly the word "Galilean" reached his ears.

"Is this man a Galilean?" he asked, and being answered in the affirmative,

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Pilate seized upon this as a pretext to declare that he had no jurisdiction: the Accused, as a Galilean, must be tried by Herod.

Herod happened to be at that moment in Jerusalem, and since he was on the best of terms with the Romans, Pilate thought to conciliate him by declining to trespass on his rights, while at the same time he would save his own face with the Jews. It seemed a happy solution. Let Herod decide!

In reality Pilate had again yielded. This time his weakness degenerated into cowardice, for if justice compelled him to throw the case out of court for lack of proof, by what right did he send Jesus to Herod? Either the Accused was guilty, or He was innocent. Having acquitted him, Pilate had but to stand by his first decision. This he dared not do, however, so he must get out of it as best he could. It was again the vacillating creature, shifting the responsibility upon other shoulders.

He entered the Pretorium, convinced that the whole business was off his

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hands. The crowd moved away also, following the priests and ancients to Herod's court. The shouting died down, the square was cleared.

"Kings govern strongly," said Bosuet. Nothing is so fatal to a people, to a family, or to an assembly, as to rule by expediency. No one is satisfied, neither the one in authority, nor those under him; for this sort of manipulation smacks of sleight-of-hand. Probity scorns concealment, while frankness has a certain courage that accepts the consequences of its words and acts. And of what is courage composed if not of strength and truth? Both of these qualities were singularly lacking in Pilate.

Presently a new outburst startled him from his cowardly quiet. Herod had sent Jesus back to Pilate. After amusing himself at the expense of the Accused, he had pronounced no judgment. Cruelly thrust back upon his perplexities, Pilate endeavored, nevertheless, to profit by Herod's refusal. He was a Jew without doubt, his name

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alone would suffice to establish Christ's innocence. Moreover, his refusal to try the case could not but have pleased the people! Who knows? After all, affairs might yet terminate satisfactorily.

This time he summoned the princes of the priests, and the Sanhedrin, and with the design of flattering their vanity and conciliating the people, showed himself condescending, appeared to consult them, to take their view.

"You have presented unto me this man, as one that perverteth the people; and behold I, having examined him before you, find no cause in this man, in those things wherein you accuse him. No, nor Herod neither. For I sent you to him, and behold, nothing worthy of death is done to him. I will chastise him therefore, and release him." (Luke 22 : 14-16.)

And even in this Pilate was guilty of fresh cowardice. Why punish Jesus? If the punishment meant flagellation, the Jews needed no permission from a

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Roman governor to inflict this torture, which was within their law. The truth was that He had been brought before Pilate to suffer the death sentence. This was evident from the beginning. "Our law forbids us to kill," said the priests openly, "and we have come to ask His death of you." Hence the flagellation was a useless cruelty, incapable of softening the priests or of calming the people.

This soon became evident to the procurator. The shrewd priests, the mutinous people had detected his weakness. Alive to his subterfuges, they knew they had but to impose their will upon him and force him to deliver the Accused.

On his side, however, Pilate's resolution to save Jesus was strengthening; his pity for Him seemed awakened. Perhaps, after taking the stand that He was innocent, and having twice publicly announced that he found no ground for condemning Him, he felt that he had gone too far to retract. Moreover, it was beneath his dignity

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to listen to these envious and stiff-necked Jews, for he knew the jealousy that was eating at their hearts. So half from vanity, half from a natural commiseration, he made another attempt to save the Victim. His crafty policy deluded him into fancying that he had hit upon the right thing. He recognized the fact that in this agitated mass crowding the steps of his tribunal, the priests led, and the crowd blindly followed. What a stroke if he could create a schism, and save Jesus by turning the crowd against their priests! The idea seemed a stroke of genius.

It was the custom on the Paschal feast to release to the people a condemned criminal. There awaited execution a brigand called Barabbas, a murderer and fomenter of sedition, one whom the people held in terror. He would place this outlaw beside Jesus, Jesus who had gone about doing good, who had given sight to the blind, healed the lepers, and even raised the dead. Jesus, the public benefactor, on one side; Barabbas, the hardened crim-

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inal, on the other. The decision should be left to the people—only the people; their voice was to be the deciding voice. The result of the voting, he felt that he already knew. From the judge's bench, in a setting that proclaimed his power, in the exercise of which he now swayed toward mercy, he flung to the quivering, eager mass below his clever and startling proposition.

“Whom will you that I release to you, Barabbas, or Jesus that is called Christ?” (Matt. 27 : 17)

He waited. Unconsciously he was again compromising, his third and last act of cowardice. Further and further was he drifting from the good impulse which said to him: “This Man is innocent.” To couple Jesus' name with that of Barabbas, was to imply the guilt of Jesus. Nay, more, it connoted a death sentence, since on that day only one under a death penalty could be released. His intention, it is true, was to awaken in the populace a preference for Jesus. In reality he

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put Him on the same footing with the murderer.

Pilate waited, sure of the success of this expedient; and at that moment he received a message from his wife, urging him to have nothing to do with the affair of this just Man. But the priests saw the procurator's guile. They dispersed at once among the crowd. Like a hidden leaven, a secret venom, they circulated and explained, and excited those already inflamed minds; and when Pilate rose and leaned out above them, to hear their reply, the whole multitude together cried, "Barabbas! Not this man, but Barabbas! Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas!"

XIV

The Fear of Strength

DURING all this turmoil, Jesus stood bound. Dignified, silent, He waited, hearing all. What was in the Master's mind, as He assisted at His own dishonoring? To realize the venom of the crowd and that it would force the verdict, to know that at His side stood the man who could save Him with a word. But that word Pilate was too cowardly to utter! Yet Jesus had pity, and kept silence—seeing before His eyes the silence of all the Pilates of the future, some in public life, others in the secret of their souls.

The Pilates in public life are the rulers who could stop evil and arrest persecution, and who under pretext that they did not make the law, refuse the responsibility of enforcing justice. As Pilate did, these wash their hands. 'Tis well. The hands are cleansed, but

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the stain is on the heart, there ever to remain. It is possible that responsibility for the execution of a law may rest upon a man who did not make that law. Pilate had not made the law that condemned Jesus to death, and yet He was executed on Pilate's order.

The Pilates in the soul are we, ourselves, in the presence of temptation—giving way inch by inch, to a passion that prefers the shameful Barabbas before Our Saviour!

The clamor of an entire people in delirium was painful hearing for the procurator. His hand was forced, and resentfully he called to the mob: "What will you then that I do to the king of the Jews?" (Mark 15 : 12).

Then, for the first time, burst spontaneously from a thousand throats that terrifying cry of death: "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Pilate recoiled before this murderous clamor, and cut short the vociferating Jews with the biting retort: "Why, what evil hath he done?" "Let him be crucified!" reiterated the mob.

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Pilate would not take this word, but returned to the thought of the scourging. He believed that the sight of blood would appease the populace.

"I find no cause in him," he said; "I will chastise him, therefore, and let him go."

JESUS was scourged. We know the thoroughness with which the executioners did their work, and in what lamentable condition the Victim reappeared. As he saw this Man, streaming with blood, Pilate hoped that he had at last succeeded in saving Him. What rage, what hate could persist in the presence of that blood-stained Creature?

He forgot, alas! that blood intoxicates those who see it flow, nor did he suspect that his cowardice had dragged him to the level of the crowd, and even lower. For although he addressed them from the terrace, he was in reality dominated by them.

"Behold the man!" he cried; which meant: "Now, are you satisfied? Do

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you still believe this object can longer cherish the illusion that He is a king? Behold the man!"

The soldiers had made sport of Christ in the courtyard. They had clothed Him in the royal robe and crowned Him in derision with a circle of thorns. So Pilate hoped that Christ's pitiful condition and mock attire would save Him, that he himself would escape through the ridicule that made Jesus of so little account.

But the mob was no longer in the mood for laughter. Thanks to the subtle work of the priests and ancients, they had degenerated into a state of bestiality. They were no longer to be amused with grimaces, with tattered court mantles, with buffetings. Nor did the blood that flowed from the scourging slake their thirst. Mockery could not satisfy these men who demanded a death-sentence.

"Crucify him! Crucify him!" Again that terrible cry came from thousands of throats, in an overwhelming force that broke the will and crushed every

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good impulse. "Death to him!" howled the mob; the cry that has echoed in the train of many earthly sovereigns shall ring through the streets until it has obtained the head of Christ. And the tumult grew. "Away with him, away with him! Crucify him!"

"Shall I crucify your King?" The procurator's voice rang out above the din and clamor.

"We have no king but Caesar," answered the priests.

"I find no cause in him," repeated the procurator in desperation, attesting once more to Jesus' innocence.

"He makes himself the Son of God," answered the priests. The Son of God! Now at last the accusation is given voice. Before this they had not dared utter it. The death sentence had been demanded for an agitator, death for one who evaded the payment of tribute money, death for the lunatic who called himself a king—all of which, to the ears of a man of reason, gave no ground for capital punishment. The mask had fallen. Death is demanded

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for the blasphemer who claims to be the Son of God.

Pilate trembled at these words, and why? Did he believe in the divinity of this flayed and despised Being before him? Who knows?

Suddenly turning, he entered the Pretorium and had Jesus brought again to question Him. What passed between those two men alone, face to face, is not known—between the man who had it in his power to save the God, and the God who certainly longed to save the man. All we do know is that after this, Pilate came forth determined to save Jesus, resolved to act with firmness and impose his authority. Hence the whole question was opened once again.

Of Pilate's intentions there can be no doubt. He sought sincerely, taxed his wits, was firmly decided to find a way to save the Prisoner. But being both feeble and violent in character, he swung from one side to the other as impulse moved him. Now he was on the side of courage. The priests, seeing

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this unsuspected element of strength in their opponent, and fearing Christ would slip through their hands, played their last trump card. Returning to the title of king which Jesus had arrogated to Himself, and upon which they had harped persistently, they elbowed their way hastily and violently toward Pilate.

“If thou release this man thou art not Caesar’s friend. For whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Caesar.” And the Caesar who will suffer no contradiction is called Tiberius. And Tiberius was doubtless far away in the soft voluptuous Capri, but informers were everywhere, and at a sign from the distant master, as at the wand of Tarquin of old, heads fell off.

In a flash all the old disputes with these people and the dreaded emperor’s intervention passed through Pilate’s mind, and his self-interest prevailed. Deafened by the clamors, overwhelmed by the struggle without issue, feeling that despite all his efforts the ground was slipping from under him, after

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many fruitless attempts, he threw up his arms in a gesture of discouragement. Then, taking water, he washed his hands before the people.

"I am innocent of the blood of this just man," he said. "Look you to it."

Pitiful subterfuge, vain speech! when he had but to pronounce one word, the one that would have saved the innocent Victim! And so terminated, after four hours of dispute and turmoil, the drama of Pilate's cowardice.

Christ left the court condemned to death. The procurator signed the death warrant, and had caused to be written in large letters on a bit of wood: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." He could not have written more truly: "Son of God."

"I am innocent of the blood of this man," he had said. He believed this, perhaps, but until the end of time and beyond, no one else will believe it, and the Christian world will continue to repeat: "I believe in Jesus Christ,

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. . . . who suffered under Pontius Pilate and was crucified.”

Would that all kings and judges of this world might take this lesson to heart and profit by it!

XV

Jerusalem—Rejecting and Rejected

ONE leaves the Pretorium with a heavy heart. Pilate is so pathetic, so culpable a figure. He has evinced good will, and is yet so lacking in courage. His name has come down through the ages as the synonym for cowardice; just as Judas' name is given to a traitor. To be compared to either of these characters is the grossest insult one can offer any man. In reality, both were traitors. The one betrayed his Master and Friend; the other betrayed truth. 'Tis a terrible thing to have been unfaithful to the light, and Pilate in his heart knew that Jesus was innocent. His conscience, his common sense, his honor cried out to him to save a guiltless human being—and yet he weakly surrendered to popular clamor, and condemned Him.

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Those who exercise that authority upon which the whole social fabric rests, and who for personal ends betray the truth they had sworn to defend, will suffer always the sting of remorse that accompanies any departure from principle and rectitude. When God makes His presence felt, it is at a man's own peril that he endeavors to ignore Him. Nay, more—God must be first. On this choice of God in preference to the world lies the foundation of eternal happiness.

Oh! my soul, upon what are thy affections set? Does thy heart cling to the things of earth, or does it soar to the eternal joys of heaven? Love is as a scale; rising, descending, we follow ever the inclinations of our heart. Jesus, following the inclination of His Sacred Heart, was climbing Calvary; despite the pain, the desolation that this sacrifice meant, He knew that on Golgotha He would save humanity and glorify His Father. It was for Him a bitter joy, a joyful sorrow.

And although Jesus seemed to have

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traveled the full cycle of torture, there remained yet one torment He still willed to suffer, one that tore His Heart although at first this suffering seemed lost in the bitter sea of His Passion.

Jesus was a man and Jew, and profoundly loved His country. Jerusalem, for the children of Israel, was the most cherished spot on earth, the blessed land, the common center wherein all differences were merged. Wayfarers sang for joy as they journeyed towards the Holy City; children grew up with the hope of one day seeing the Temple that God had deigned to honor with His Presence. The aged, prevented by infirmities from making the journey, wept, and lived on the memory of what their eyes had once beheld.

But apart from this radiant presence of God in the holy Temple, Jerusalem itself was of such transcendent beauty that it might well have enthralled an entire people. From whatever side one regarded the Holy City, it appeared resplendent with light and radiance. On beholding it today, desolate, bar-

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ren, denuded of its verdant crown and with crumbling gray walls, it is hard to believe in, or form a picture of, its ancient splendors.

BUT we must see Jerusalem as Jesus saw it; as it appeared to the Romans, and as it was loved and venerated by the Jews before Titus laid upon it his destructive hand. Without doubt the most fairy-like aspect of the city was obtained in coming from Bethany, despite the mute desolation of the Valley of Josaphat, over which the eyes roamed before resting upon the glory of Jerusalem. To-day, as ever, that valley, with its array of flat white tombs, is a mournful sight; here and there a lonely olive tree intensifies its desolation, and on the mountain side the paths run between crumbling walls, barren of moss or leaf or blade of grass.

Only the pool of Siloe is brightened by a border of fresh mulberry trees, and fields of artichokes form a carpet with their thick green stalks in the adjacent humid soil; an oasis, as it were, in an

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arid land, dust covered and overhung with an air of sadness.

But in Jesus' time the arid ridges of this landscape were lost in a wealth of verdure. Pink and white orchards, terraced vineyards, turfs of tamarisk, canopies of mulberry trees and drooping sycamores made of it a garden of delight, a feast for the eye. And descending the Mount of Olives under a tangle of flowering branches, suddenly through the foliage, one glimpsed in its emerald setting the soaring outlines of Jerusalem.

The deep valley of Cedron, dark with swaying cedars, lay beneath; the crenellated walls of the city formed an airy lace-work contrasting with the sombre mass over which it towered; higher up scintillated the dazzling golden dome of the sanctuary, reflecting flaming rays upon the snow-white walls of the edifice. In the words of a contemporary, one beheld here a mass of golden flame crowning a mountain of snow.

On the other side of the city, behind the Temple, rose Herod's three high

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towers: Phasaël, resembling the great light-house of Alexandria; Mariamne, built, it was said, of one solid piece of marble; and Hippicus, rising to a height of one hundred and twenty feet. To these three towers, of a beauty and solidity so extraordinary that Josephus tells us that nothing comparable to them existed in the world, must be added the octagonal tower of Psephinus, from the top of which one had a glimpse of the Mediterranean.

This blue-pinnacled apparition, almost transparent against a sky flecked with fleecy pink clouds and trailings of purple from the setting sun, rested upon a mountain 2,500 feet high; and even to-day, although it is denuded of the Temple, of Psephinus, of Phasaël, of its fire, its gold, and the snow of its marbles, one gazes in awe at this city rising against the same flaming sky.

“Jerusalem! Jerusalem! should I ever forget thee, may my arm be shortened, and my parched tongue cleave to my palate.”

This was the Jerusalem upon which

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Jesus had gazed with longing as He slowly descended the slopes of Gethsemani to mount to the Golden Gate, where cries of hosanna burst from the multitude, and where, moved by the splendors and enchantment of the view, He wept over His beloved city. For He saw, even then, the destruction that would come upon this marvel of beauty, its glory gone forever, desolation brooding over its ruins. This desolation foretold by Our Lord, still reigns in Jerusalem and His murder alone explains the halt of civilization at the gate of the most glorious city the world has ever seen. The sorrows and sufferings of Jesus hover over its arid landscape and, it would seem, have cast a blight even upon its vegetation.

Religion in Jerusalem wears a sorrowful mien; the Christians all go humbly to kiss the empty tomb, and the open rock of Calvary. The various rites clash and mix in an interchange of commiseration and envy, and all this in the spot where divine charity was born,

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and where there should be but one great and united love. Paid guards smoke and drink at the foot of Calvary, ten paces from the sepulchre. One comes away saddened from this strange medley, shocked and impressed, above all, by the desolation—that desolation predicted by Jesus, whose anathema still echoes in the bickering and gloom of ungodly turmoil.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, hadst thou but wished it, thou wouldst have known the happy time of the visit of thy God! Now a day shall come, when thy walls shall be surrounded by the enemy, and of thy Temple—that Temple of incomparable beauty—not a stone shall remain upon a stone. Nothing can resist the anger of God. Thou shalt be thrown to earth, trampled under foot by the nations, and remain ever a desolate desert. “If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace; but now they are hidden from thy eyes” (Luke 19 : 42). “And beholding the city, Jesus wept over it.”

God weeps over the future, for He

alone knows it; to His creatures in His infinite goodness He says: "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." (Matt. 6 : 34). But to Him whose day is eternal, the evils of to-morrow are present. He measures them and their consequences, and it is for this He weeps. We are too forgetful of the eye of God, that is always on us—in the present, as well as in the future.

He weeps over our falls of the morrow, even in our moments of fervor, for He sees all. When He came to our hearts for the first time, giving us the kiss of peace and His blood to drink, He knew that afterwards we would seek to quench our thirst at another chalice. Yet he withdraws not the one He puts to our lips. He sees what our hands shall touch, what our eyes shall look upon; yet never does He withhold His loving embrace, nor is it less tender, nor is His glance less loving. But His sorrow is known only to the celestial spirits, who marvel that after spilling His blood for mankind, He yet has

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tears to shed over our unspeakable ingratitude.

LET us dwell a moment on these tears. O Jesus, I count those Thou hast shed over my unfaithfulness, I place them in the chalice of thanksgiving, which I would daily offer to Thee. "I will take the chalice of salvation; and I will call upon the name of the Lord" (Ps. 115 : 13). From Thy Heart, wounded by our ingratitude, there rises a cry, which saves rather than condemns us. 'Tis the secret of Calvary, that shall endure until the end of time. In default of blood, Thou dost give Thy tears, as prayers that efface our iniquities.

And so we understand the intimate sufferings of Our Lord over the ingratitude of Jerusalem, and His love for it, and His sorrow at leaving this city so dear to His Heart.

It is not presuming too much to suppose that, if Jesus wept upon His solemn entry into the city shortly before His death, He experienced an un-

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utterable feeling of sadness at the moment He left the Judgment Gate and passed for the last time the ramparts of the beloved city, to climb to His death on Calvary.

That face, so fair, the face Veronica wiped, marked with the pallor of death, was once bathed in tears. He was guarded, it is true, by Gentiles, hired and barbarous Romans; but He knew full well that He had been delivered by His own people, who were even now in the vanguard of the procession. The ancients, the scribes, the high priest himself, all were there. The city, with its murmur, its turmoil, its agitation, receded at each step. He advanced, knowing that He would never again enter that city. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if thou hadst known!"

The suffering inflicted by our own people is doubly painful. "For if my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it. But thou, . . . my guide, and my familiar . . . in the house of God we walked with consent." (Ps. 54:13-15). Such were

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the thoughts that filled Jesus' heart in that terrible moment; and these sufferings are renewed in the silence and loneliness of the Tabernacle each time that sin drives Him out of a soul which He has purchased with His precious blood.

“Chosen and cherished soul, what have I done to thee?” He asks again. Oh, silence! Oh, loving plaint! Oh, Jesus, expelled from souls dear to Thee! Shouldst Thou deign to place Thyself in my path, I would cry, “Come, come, I beseech Thee! I welcome Thee in place of those by whom Thou hast been rejected; may my love, engendered by Thy divine presence, be a refuge for Thy love so often betrayed and spurned.”

There exist souls dear to God's heart, that are yet capable of casting Him out; these are the most ungrateful, for are they not the ones that have been the most favored? And there are nations, too, that, like Jerusalem, shall be finally rejected, after marvels of love have been accomplished in their midst.

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Jerusalem, if thou hadst known that true love is measured by fidelity! What avails it to have been chosen and loved beyond others if, when God calls, the soul does not return love for love! God's heart will be turned away, then, and given to another. He can bring forth children of Abraham from the arid rock. He can bring forth lilies from the mire.

Jesus continued His upward climb. It was noon. The Temple resounded with the tones of the sacred trumpets; the golden dome and the snow-white walls shone in the splendor of the mid-day sun; the cloud of incense mounted in a column above the Holy of Holies; the bleating of the lambs came from the pool wherein they were plunged before the great sacrifice of the ninth hour; and strangers gathered and crowded into the narrow streets and the court of the Temple.

And at this moment the sinister cortège of the condemned Criminal arrived at the summit of Calvary. Jesus was nailed to the cross, His back turned

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to the Jerusalem that had abandoned Him, His arms outstretched toward the west, where through time and space His dying eyes rested upon a new people who awaited Him,

PART THREE

The Summit of Torture

I

His Divine Radiance is Obliterated

WE look up at the blood-soaked cross and contemplate, with mixed feelings of horror and love, the divine face of Our Saviour. The Prophet Isaiah wails: “. . . there is no beauty in him, nor comeliness: and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of him” (Isaiah 53:2). With what anguish and longing we dwell upon the ancient fairness of that beloved visage, now soiled with the shame of spittle, furrowed with streaks of blood, begrimed with dirt! “How changed He is!” is the cry that escapes from every lip

What contrast between this present disfigurement and former comeliness! This thought is fraught with wonder and profound sadness. Through the

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pallor that overspreads the drawn and distorted features, one goes back in memory to their former beauty, to the penetrating charm of the eyes, the winning smile. O God! how changed He is! All traces of the loveliness, the radiance that illumined His face and drew all men to Him, are gone. To-day, there is only a livid, blood-stained mask, and death.

A mournful little group of friends, faithful through contempt and dishonor, are standing at the foot of the cross. They feed their anguish during the long hours of darkness and silence, on the glory of that once captivating visage: Mary His Mother, Magdalen the pardoned, John the friend of His Heart, and other devoted ones. The head of the dying Master has fallen forward under the weight of the crown of thorns; the hair hangs heavy and matted about His face; streaks of blood mark furrows in His cheeks; the lips are swollen and discolored; the mouth gapes open; the eyes brim with tears. And His precious blood flows

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in streams; a few drops, alas, would not suffice to wash away our sins.

No, it is no longer a human face that the little group gazes upon; and of all who gaze, His friends alone see His countenance as it was in its former beauty and charm.

II

His Mother's Heart is Pierced

BEHOLD His Mother!

We cherish memories of our friends and memories of our mothers but a mother's memory in all that relates to her child is more tenacious. It reaches back to the child's first days and only to the mother is it given to find in the son grown to manhood the ingenuous look of the babe she held in her arms. Nor does she forget with what a combination of travail and rapture she brought that frail life into the world. Mothers would keep their children always little, always in their arms, always dependent upon their tender care. But the march of time hurries the sons from that sweet shelter out into the battle of life; and all that is left the mother is the land of memory, wherein she dwells upon the enchanted scenes of childhood.

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Nor did Mary escape the sweet tyranny of motherhood. In the livid, blood-stained figure of her beloved Son, in the outraged and distorted features of the Victim hanging on the cross, she still saw the winsome face of the Child of Bethlehem and Nazareth. "But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2: 19). Often indeed, in hours of grief and tears, our sorrow is made more poignant by the memory of lost happiness, until the contrast between the sunshine of other days and the lowering clouds of the present makes the heart sick with inexpressible longing.

Bethlehem with its terraced vineyards and olive groves, the stable where Christ was born, the shepherds kneeling in wonder and adoration around the manger, the effulgence of the angels chanting and hovering over the divine Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes—all were visions of lost happiness to Mary. The same sad memory recalled the flight from Herod's cruelty, the setting out, Child

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in arms, in the dead of night at a word from Joseph, to take the road to exile across the trackless wastes of the desert. The tranquil and amber Nile, the pyramids, the mocking sphinx, the rigid obelisk, and the crouching gods in the dusky temples, were all as so many shifting scenes in this Mother's memory. But Mary could bend over the sleeping face of her Child; to possess Him was happiness; hardship and exile were forgotten while she held her God in her arms.

The Child grew in grace and years; she remembered the first lisping of those lips that on Calvary were smeared with blood and the froth of death, she recalled with what sweetness they had formed the name of Mary! Exile ceases to be exile when the soul possesses Jesus. Mary clung always to her quiet happiness in the safety of the desert; she left it but to follow the road that led up to Calvary, where she stood contrasting in her breaking heart the happiness of those far-off days with the agony of the present.

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She saw Nazareth, and their humble dwelling; the workshop, and the Child at play in the sweet scented shavings—all the beauty of their obscure lives. How often we realize our happiness only when it is gone from us! Then came the death of the foster-father, leaving the Mother and Son alone. In the sweet intimacy of those succeeding years the Child became a Youth. With what emotion the Mother noted the growing gravity and deepening thoughtfulness of His face. When He was a Child, she had kissed and fondled Him; a few years later and He had become her inspiration; His lips and eyes spoke and she listened and sat at His feet in the dusk to drink in His words. She had chosen the better part.

Those about her had ever been ignorant of the great and joyous mystery of her life with her Son. Her relations, her nephews, even her sister, seemed not to realize what manner of Child, of Youth, of Man, they had among them. But what matter, since

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she knew, and in her loving mother-heart jealously guarded the knowledge she alone possessed. This ineffable felicity had lasted for nearly thirty years. And it had been all too short!

THEN, one evening Jesus had told her that they must part. On the morrow He went away. The Mother gazed through blinding tears at the retreating form of her beloved Son on the Galilean highway, setting out alone. He had not yet called His Apostles and she could not follow Him. Her happiness was over. During the three years of His public life, only on rarest occasions did she see Him alone.

His great mission absorbed the Messias. His face, burned by the sun and worn with fatigue, became graver, and athwart the brow she had kissed the Mother discerned the shadow of the cross. And then came the day when she stood in the shadow of that cross—not a vision but a hard reality!

How vividly the scenes of the past flitted through Mary's memory in the

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presence of the ghastly actuality. Anguish tore at her heart; her arms reached toward her Son; groping for support in her failing strength she encountered only the cross—everywhere, the cross on which Jesus was dying.

To cling to the cross that crushes us; to lean on it in hours of faintness and weariness; to be bathed in the blood of Jesus, and mingle with it our own; to have no confidant other than the God who strikes, and to stand valiant under the blows, like the Mother of Sorrows, is to imitate the Mother who gave her Son for our redemption.

There are few spiritual summits higher than Calvary. Souls called to participate in the sufferings of our beloved Lord must climb the mountain silently, their wounds rather than their lips proclaiming their undying love.

III

The Penitent's Love is Tried

TRADITION is unanimous in placing Magdalen, the great penitent, in a humble and loving posture at the foot of the cross. It would seem as though she hardly dared look up into the face of Christ; and yet, from her place in the dust, she had but to lift her head to encounter the gaze of His eyes suffused with tears and blood, the same eyes that had looked upon her and forgiven her much in the house of Simon (Luke 7: 37-50).

There, in the shadow of the cross, she too returned in memory to those days of grace and the miracle of love that had transformed her soul, and to those days when she had first beheld the Master.

With what interest and yet what secret fear she had sought out the

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Wonder-Worker who was credited with the power of reading the hearts of men. Then, inspired by grace, the longing to see again the gentle yet strong personality that drew her, had sprung up in her heart. Curiosity and a mixture of emotions had driven her to seek Jesus many times. Always, however, on returning to her luxurious life after these encounters, she had felt a growing shame, a loathing for the objects she had treasured, and had obtained at the price of virtue.

All return to God begins with some disillusionment, as a great searchlight falling from above, revealing the emptiness of earthly things. God never forces a soul; the beauty of His countenance works the irrevocable change. Then the fruits of pleasure, sweet and cloying, take on a strange and bitter flavor. The lower nature still longs for that taste, but the hand snatches the deceptive fruit from the trembling lips. Unconscious of the change that is working in her, the soul continues to flit from flower to flower in a vain

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search for the delectable honey she does not find.

Magdalen remembered the vague uneasiness that had possessed her when, on the horizon of her life, she beheld, slowly rising, the glorious sun of that face, human and divine, whose radiance dazzled and fascinated her. As she stood on Calvary, she lived again through that day when, decked out in all the bravery of her rich attire, still the public sinner, she had gone forth with her box of ointments, and entered the banquet hall of the Pharisee where she knew she would find the Man from Galilee. Rich men were reclining on couches drawn up around the table, but as she was known to the servants, she slipped in unhindered. And once she reached His side, she forgot all else. Magdalen, the proud voluptuary, now in tears, fell on her knees at the feet of divine and radiant purity.

There are certain virtues that are acquired only on the knees and in an attitude of humility. Purity is one of them.

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A hush fell upon the scene; the host, his guests and servants, were astounded at the sight of Magdalen in this humble posture, pouring the contents of the precious box over the feet of Jesus, still wet with her repentant tears. But on that day, in her rightful place, her own head bowed under opprobrium, she performed a sacred and august ceremony—the consecration of a repentant soul amid the murmurs and protests of the guests and the titters and suppressed mirth of the attendants.

Magdalen was conscious only of the Master, at whose feet she could not humble herself enough. Undoing the long hair that fell rippling over her bowed form, she avowed by this act her life of sin, as she crouched like a slave to wipe with her splendid tresses the divine feet she had wet with her tears as she had kissed them passionately in heartbroken sorrow and repentance.

“Nowhere,” says Lacordaire, “does history show us sin and repentance together more strikingly and touchingly

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portrayed.” (*Life of Mary Magdalen*, Ch. 3.)

In the heart of Simon, the Pharisee, suspicion had at once awakened. “This man, if he were a prophet,” he said within himself, “would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, that she is a sinner.” Magdalen could not penetrate the thoughts of those about her, but their mutterings reached her ears. Suddenly a voice was lifted in her defense; nay, more, she heard excuses offered in her behalf, even praise, and crowning all, words of pardon.

“And he said to her: Thy sins are forgiven thee. . . . Thy faith hath made thee safe, go in peace” (Luke 7 : 48, 50).

Christ’s gentle tones and His look of compassion had pierced the heart of the sinful woman who gazed through her tears and the silken meshès of her hair upon the face of the divine Master.

The marvel of grace that had so cast her down, had at the same instant lifted her to the heights. Her feet, a

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moment ago begrimed with the mire of sin, no longer touched the earth. Rehabilitated, radiant, pure, she would henceforth attach herself to Jesus, to follow whither He led, yes, even to climb Golgotha with Him.

“Behold the flight of the soul wounded by the love of God!” exclaims Bossuet in his sermon on Virgin Saints. (*Panegyric on St. Teresa*). Magdalen through her repentance was caught up in this heavenward flight of pure souls. She soared to the summit of Calvary where an honored place awaited her beside the chaste Queen of virgins and the Apostle.

O SINNER, be thou man or woman, soul on the road to ruin, slave of the flesh, be thy sins as numerous as the sands of the sea, fear not, for out of the most heinous crimes, God can fashion stepping-stones by which thou canst mount to Him—if, like Magdalen, thou dost humble thyself with true repentance.

Magdalen fell so low because she

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loved unwisely and too well. Her spiritual love and self-abandonment lifted her, then, to Calvary's summit where, at the foot of the cross, her repentance shines, and where her love stands the supreme test of strength and endurance.

In the great silence and gloom of Calvary, those words spoken in Simon's house, "Forgiven!", "Go in peace!", were beating in her memory. A new life had begun in earnest when she heard them, a new joy and peace had been born in her heart. And now in looking upon the agonizing face above her, she comprehended that her peace had been bought at the price of that stark cross, of the nails buried in hands and feet, and of death, whose pale shadow stole over that adorable face. Yes, crouching at Jesus' feet, Magdalen lifted her eyes to the livid, blood-stained face of the Saviour, upon which was written His mercy and her pardon. What a world of sorrow and love in that look!

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There is a certain peace on the faces of repentant and pardoned souls, just as there is a radiance on the faces of the pure and innocent. Which wears the greater sweetness and serenity of expression? Which beams with the intenser joy? This is God's secret, and that of His chosen ones.

To me, O Lord, it seems that a greater love shall shine forth in my eyes—because out of the shattered fragments of the chains of my sins so often broken by Thy mercy, I can fashion a tie, strong and sweet, with which to bind myself for time and eternity to Thy immense charity.

IV

His Chosen People Mock Him

SILENT voices of tender memories rise like soothing incense from the heart of Mary and the heart of Magdalen to the desolate Heart of Jesus—but they are blown aside by acrid fumes of hatred.

There were shouting and confusion in this last explosion of satisfied rage. The last scene of the cruel drama was drawing to a close. God above was silent; men's vile passions were given free rein. The mob, the executioners, the soldiers, the priests, the Pharisees, all talked, shouted, ran to and fro, excited, mocking.

It would seem that all the hatred that had been accumulating during the past days had found expression in a bitter, biting mockery which was flung at Jesus by the Scribes and ancients, who hoped that they were now looking

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for the last time upon the eyes that had filled them with a strange fear, and the lips that had reproached them with hard and bitter truths. Their derisive and cruel words rose in gusts over the heads of the bowed and broken Magdalen and of Mary His Mother, who felt those shoutings as yet another blow on the face of their agonizing Friend.

"In Christ's Passion," says Bossuet, "there is so strange a mingling of derision and cruelty, that it is difficult to say which dominates; yet mockery prevails." (*Second Sermon on the Passion*, Part I.)

Why should this be so? Why this atmosphere of derision? How explain the premeditated design to dishonor the Victim? Nay, more; when all forms of physical torture had been exhausted, for He was nailed fast and bathed in blood, they inflicted a mental suffering in thus mocking a helpless creature. They taunted Him with His own words, which seemed still fast in their memories and drew from them a

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bitter sap to whet their thirst for revenge.

“Vah, thou that destroyest the temple of God, and in three days dost rebuild it: come down from the cross,” shouts the rabble (Matt. 27:40.) The conversations between the Scribes and priests are audible to Jesus’ ears. “He saved others,” say the priests to the people, “himself he can not save.” He called Himself the Son of God, and trusted in the Father; and has God lifted a finger to deliver Him? So they talked wisely among themselves and with a great wagging of heads, even among those who looked and passed by.

Mockery spread to the executioners and the hired soldiers guarding the three gibbets. These induced their comrades who were gambling for the Victim’s garments at the foot of the cross, to offer Him a cup of wine, in derision. “And the soldiers,” we read in St. Luke, “also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar.” (Luke 23:36) Until His last cry of

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anguish, Christ was the victim of sinister mockery.

Then that poor 'malefactor,' "his heart become like wax melting" (Ps. 21:15), cried despairingly, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The guards exclaimed: "Behold he calleth Elias" (Mark 15:35).

To a soldier who ran to dip the sponge in vinegar to moisten His dying lips, they shouted: "Stay! Let us see if Elias come to take him down." To His last breath these taunts reached the ears of the dying Christ. In truth, mockery had the last word in the tragic scene.

But why the scornful wagging of heads? The reason is clear, cruelly clear; for mockery is the doubtful triumph of vanity and pride. Goaded by its very meanness mockery searches into the hidden recesses of the victim's soul. It tears to shreds every vestige of honor, thus to kill the man in the eyes of the world. Mockery, moreover, is a deadly weapon that aims to reach beyond the grave. The heart

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crushed under jeers and mockery knows no hope in its last moments, of living on in honored memory.

This explains the persecution of Christ by the Jews, priests, and Pharisees, who jeered at and derided, to His last gasp, the Man who had humiliated them and who had boasted that He would rise again on the third day. He must be utterly destroyed. And indeed, it looked as though they had succeeded in their fell design. Such are the plans of men.

Since mockery could annihilate its victim, it is possible that Christ willed to be mocked and derided; cruelly to be made sport of, in order to effect this annihilation. "He emptied himself." (Phil. 2: 7)

The Lamb that bore the sins of the world must submit, not only to the knife that opens His veins and searches His entrails, but to the poisoned dart of jeers and sarcasm that turns to ridicule His meekness, His sublime and divine silence. When mockery has done its worst, neither honor nor pity

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is left to the victim's name; he is dead morally and physically and the holocaust is whole and entire. That Christ willed this explains all. But there were other motives that appeal touchingly to our piety and gratitude.

Jesus, who knows the future, saw His elect mocked. He saw their piety and virtue made sport of by this choice weapon of the world; He wished them to have a model (far beyond perfect imitation, it is true); and He knew that in beholding Him under the lash of such scorn and ridicule, they could take courage from His example.

This phase of the Passion is the one we shall have to imitate on but too frequent occasions. It is not given to every soul to bear the cruel stigmata of the nails nor the abrasions of the thorns nor the welts of the whips. The sufferings of the martyrs are the privilege of the select few. But what man goes through life without meeting some humiliation or contempt from his own friends or at the hands of strangers?

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“The simplicity of the just man is laughed to scorn” (Job 12: 4). The child-like confidence of the just is ridiculed, the humble are regarded as fanatics, for these love God after the manner of Christ’s teachings, and their lives are a rebuke to men of the world.

Jeers are doubly painful when inflicted by those near to us, from whom we have every right to expect consolation and support. “They that dwell in my house, and my maidservants have counted me as a stranger, and I have been like an alien in their eyes” (Job 19: 15). And again, ‘I am become a reproach among all my enemies, and very much to my neighbors; and a fear to my acquaintances’ (Ps. 30: 12).

AND now let us lift our gaze to the disfigured face of the Redeemer, and above the bloody crown and bowed head, let us read that title which contains in itself all the mockery and hatred that animated those below. Again, we have the concealed reason that impelled Jesus to die amid the

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jeers of the populace. He desired through humiliation, to triumph publicly over His greatest enemy, the world, that world of vanity and illusion which is the work of the devil. (Bossuet, *Second Sermon on the Passion*.)

"Fear not," says the dishonored mouth of Jesus, "have confidence, I have conquered the world."

"Where, Lord?"

"On the cross."

"How, Lord?"

"With the cross."

Only Divinity could overcome a dangerous enemy by accepting what that enemy himself most dreads—humiliation. God, who rejects evil and chooses good, tells us that ignominy, when not the result of sin, is not an evil; that derision cannot harm us; that all the riches and favors of the world are but miserable poverty. The only true wealth is to possess him who is eternal riches—God.

The world denies this. Jesus, despised, unmask the world. An unmasked enemy is an enemy half-

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beaten. Jesus goes further. He does not rest content with His first victory. He pursues His enemy and, from the gibbet of ignominy, exposes the world's shams and weaknesses. He could not prove to us the vanity of the supposed power of the world more clearly than by submitting apparently to be overthrown by it—as a giant might allow himself to be bound hand and foot by a child, knowing that with one movement he could break the bonds. “As smoke vanisheth, so let them vanish away ” (Ps. 67:2).

How small a thing, then, is this power of the world, over which Christ triumphed by the dishonor of Calvary! The world thought to be rid of Jesus forever by turning Him into an object of derision. Complacently it awaited His last sigh. Yet scarcely had Christ expired amid a chorus of mockeries, when the earth trembled, the rocks opened, and the jeering crowd fled in terror, beating their breasts. The centurion fell on his knees, proclaiming this Man verily to be the Son of God!

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World, where is your power? Another such blow, and your strength is broken. This blow Jesus deals always from the Cross, than which there is no more decisive battle-field. There He effectively triumphs over the world in turning against it its own weapon, contempt.

Christ was despised by the world; He despised it. He takes no account of its opprobrium, its mockery, its derision. St. Paul speaks of Him as one "who having joy set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame." (Heb. 12 : 2) And His arm has never known defeat in a battle against the world.

Let us as followers of Christ, also despise the world, its smiles and its frowns, despise it in all its ways, for it is both weak and false. Weak, because it trembles before contempt, and would sacrifice honor to escape it; false, because it cannot give lasting riches nor durable peace. All its promises are vain. "Look, and pass on," was the ancients' manner of showing contempt.

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Let us imitate them. Christian pride is contempt of the world.

Those who have sounded this mystery will understand what St. Paul calls "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasure of the Egyptians. For he looked unto the reward" (Heb. 11:26). It is there, my soul, that you must place your hopes and your ambitions.

Christ despised the world. To despise it is a great height to climb. He alone who has conquered himself can attain it, and then only at the cost of mounting over the ruins of things dear to his heart.

V

His Charity Embraces the Executioner

ABOVE the seething gulf of mockery, there arose triumphant, like a sweet incense amidst the acrid fumes of the holocausts, Christ's first words on the cross. He was nailed hard and fast and hanging from His wounds in unspeakable agony. Cries, threats, sobs, and maledictions flew like arrows around the pale face of the dying God. Then from His drawn lips escaped the prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Divine bounty crowns its work in the love and forgiveness that now shine on the face of Christ. These are, as it were, the last touches to His work of Redemption. So the painter pausing in deep recollection before his picture, succeeds with one last stroke, in achiev-

ing the supreme expression of his ideal.

"Father, forgive them!" Here is a prayer, but it is also an act of humility. The Son, who is God, the All-powerful, supplicates the Father to forgive His executioners. There is the tenderness that excuses, extenuates, and seeks what is good in the guilty soul that pardon may be justified. For pardon must be justified; the delicate goodness of Christ's pardon fears to wound in sparing and to humiliate in absolving.

"They know not what they do!" How could they know, these executioners, accustomed to such inhuman work? Jesus was not the first man they had crucified, nor would He be the last.

The professional executioner kills as others buy, sell, and traffic. Such men fastened Christ to the cross. As they drove the nails into His quivering flesh, their eyes were on the jug of wine that would refresh them after their labor; and on the Victim's clothing, that would fall to their lot.

"Father, forgive them!" For behold, in truth, they know not what

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they do. The priests, the ancients, and the people who jeer, indeed they know not what they do. St. Paul tells us that had they known that He was the God of glory, they would never have crucified Him. But they did not know it, and Christ was crucified because He called Himself the Messias. The Jews said that He could not be the Son of God, and in killing Him, they pretended to vindicate truth, to re-establish order, to confound the impostor, to save the people. "Father, forgive them."

Neither did the soldiers, seated beneath the three gibbets, and awaiting the end, unmoved by the convulsions and death struggles of the agonizing victims, know the Truth. Father, deign to forgive them, too, in their ignorance.

The voice from the cross fell like gentle dew upon those consumed by hatred and hardened to indifference. Those words of forgiveness proclaimed the sublimity of Christ, the immensity of His goodness, shining even in the

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darkness of His dereliction, like a glorious sun upon the ruin of men, its first rays the promise of universal pardon for all mankind.

LET us lift up our eyes, then, to the radiance of that bounty, that last and sublime expression on the face of Christ!

Forgiveness! There are few words so hard, yet so softening to men's hearts. It requires an almost superhuman effort to forgive; for indeed it is but too true that we must do violence to our fallen natures to make them generous.

In the eyes of the world, to forgive easily is a sign of weakness. A hard, unforgiving man makes himself both respected and feared. The ancients said: "What matters it to me if I be hated, so I am feared?"

Christ knew the hardness of men's hearts. To change them and soften them He willed that the first words of the crucified God should be words of pardon and love. We do not pardon

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readily because we do not realize how hatred can exist between men of the same blood, endowed with the same instincts and destined to be brothers. And this at least is a homage rendered to the fraternity of humanity. And yet the nearer the tie of blood, the deeper the affection, the more difficult it is to forgive. What more bitter than the hatred which can exist between two brothers who were nursed at the same breast, who loved the same mother, and whose lives were bound together like the branch to the vine? Who can sound the depths of the human heart?

We find it hard to pardon, because we do not seek a reason for our forgiveness. Yet this is a Christian's duty—to look for extenuating circumstances and for the good qualities of the offender. Christ discovered these even in His executioners, and in this consists the whole work of divine charity. Men are always better than they seem; few souls, no matter how perverse, but possess some secret chord that can be touched. To this hidden depth charity

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must descend, seeking the real man in the recesses of his soul, and loving him there.

But to descend, the hardest task of love, we must first ascend and say, "Father!" Then alone shall we be capable of stooping to recognize our universal brotherhood. In a measure, as we climb, the obstacles to perfect union disappear, and what at first sight seemed formidable mountains, gradually diminish and are lost in the line of the plains. Exists there a man who, at the end of his life, has not realized how often he has exaggerated his loves and hatreds?

It is in meditating at the foot of the Cross and in letting the divine word sink into their hearts, that the saints have felt their souls melt with pity and love for their fellowmen.

God is kind to a kind heart; and He returns what He receives in full measure. Holiness expresses itself in kindness, the kindness that gives and pardons. Man is never so near to God as when he imitates Him in kindness

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and this is seen in those instant conversions and changes of heart that follow the pardoning of insults and injuries. The resemblance between the Creator and creature is then complete.

Now there is no hope of salvation save to those found in the image of Christ and Christ crucified. Ah! when He leans over our death-bed, His head heavy with the crown of thorns, and on His lips those glorious words, "Father, forgive him!" let us search the past for some act of forgiveness of our own. Happy, thrice happy, if we can find it. For with this treasure in our possession we can answer, "As I have forgiven, deign, Lord, to pardon me." And should we be so fortunate as never to have seriously failed in this act of divine charity, let us, nevertheless, desire to possess charity to the supreme degree, always to extenuate and excuse the faults of others, and to be kind, that we may enter into eternal life wearing the true face of Christ, the face that pardoned all, every thing, every one on the cross.

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When these words fell from the Saviour's lips they moved the hearts about Him in various ways. Mary, so near the cross, was the first to hear them. Had they been only whispered, her alert mother's ear would have caught and comprehended their sublime generosity.

From that arid summit divine pardon fell upon arid hearts. That call of love was to re-echo through all time, but even as on Calvary, many would hear it without responding.

Magdalen also experienced a strange emotion at the words. Looking within herself, reviewing her past, she understood their full meaning. With intense gratitude she kissed those bleeding feet. In that divine cry, she heard the echo of her own pardon: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

For John and the holy women, those words were beyond their comprehension; neither did the soldiers understand them. Never before had such words fallen from the lips of the crim-

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inals they had crucified. If the Jews and Pharisees understood, they but served to incite them to more biting mockery and sarcasm. One man alone comprehended. The man blaspheming at Christ's side suddenly ceased cursing. Vanquished and instantly transformed, he turned to look at this strange, God-like being. It was the Good Thief.

VI

His Generosity Rewards the Abject

THE episode of the Good Thief is the most marvelous and for sinners, the most consoling act in the great drama of Calvary. The rapidity with which this transformation of soul was accomplished, fills us with awe and wonder.

A hurried encounter of words between the two thieves above the bowed head of Christ; a petition to Christ; His reply; and that is all. And yet, what a stupendous change! A man steeped in crime, in the twinkling of an eye is transformed into a saint, so purified, so truly one of the elect, as to merit that day admittance into paradise.

“Amen I say to thee,” I, scorned and derided, yet eternal King, that “this day thou shalt be with me in paradise”

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(Luke 23:43). An instant suffices for God to take possession of a soul and utterly transform it. Here lies our great hope and consolation.

In the rapidity of the Good Thief's conversion a deep and poignant drama was enacted whose development we shall now follow. Three figures were hanging on Calvary, their livid, dying faces looking down upon the moving crowd below. Of the three, one alone hung His head in shame for the crimes for which He paid the penalty with His life; and this one was Christ. The other two writhed in pain; shudders of hatred ran through their poor bodies. Forgetful of their years of law-breaking, they revolted at the just punishment now inflicted, and regarded Jesus as the cause of their torture. Had He not been condemned to death that day, they would not yet have been executed. They raged against the divine Victim hanging between them. "And the self-same thing the thieves also, that were crucified with him, reproached him with" (Matt. 27: 44).

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Jesus, who fathoms all hearts, doubtless had more pity for those wretched outcasts than for the mob below. He felt the agony, pain and despair that goaded them to recrimination, and it was for them, as for His executioners, that He breathed His first prayer: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Oh! mystery of divine election! Oh, the marvel of the power of our own will!

They had heard those blessed words. One was silent, oppressed. The other absorbed in his pain, his thirst to live, and his rage at Jesus who had hastened his crucifixion took up the taunts and blasphemies that were being hurled at the King. He cried out: "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us" (Luke 23: 39).

In itself this petition was not blasphemous. The thief, beside himself with pain and despair, called upon the Messiah, the Wonder-Worker, the Son of God, to save Himself, and those dying with Him. He did not ask it for

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himself alone, but "save thyself and us"—who are suffering and dying in agony. But that his prayer was preceded and followed by blasphemies, is vouched for by the evangelist. "One of those robbers who were hanged," says St. Luke, "blasphemed him."

But the other thief rebuked his fellow.

"Neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done no evil" (Luke 23: 40, 41).

Behold this poor thief, this criminal who an instant before, had vomited forth blasphemies, now suddenly pleading for the one he had insulted! Nor was it the delirium of agony, nor incoherent talk, nor the ravings of a mind deranged by suffering. No—in this rapid change of sentiment we find the miraculous work of grace.

He had heard and was still hearing the blasphemies of those below; he noted the silence of Christ, nailed to

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the cross, His prayer for forgiveness for the people; and he knew in his heart that this derided Christ was verily the Messiah, the King of the Jews, the Son of God. Overwhelmed, he grasped the monstrous injustice that nailed the beneficent Saviour to the gibbet with two outlaws. An instinct of justice told him that a God, who before long would assume His rôle of Avenger, hovered over this drama of Calvary.

"Neither dost thou fear God?" he called to his comrade in crime. "We have merited this punishment; but He, what evil has He done?"

He looked to Christ; a light broke upon his mind. No, no, that Being, dying as He was, cruelly crowned in derision, but breathing pardons and prayers in His agony, was no ordinary man. He was indeed a King. They had crucified Him as a false Messiah—but what if He were the true one? . . .

YES, He is God; I believe it, I feel it, I confess it, I would implore His help. And turning to Christ with supplica-

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tion, the Good Thief murmured: "Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom."

"Oh! wondrous conversion!" exclaims St. John Chrysostom. "He beholds a crucified impostor, and proclaims Him a King of glory!" (Chrysost. Homil. *De Cruce et de Latrone*.)

"He sees gaping wounds, and streams of blood," says St. Ambrose, "and far from believing Him a criminal, he recognizes in Him a God" (Ambrose, Serm. 50).

Eusebius tells us that he did not cry out as the other, saying, "If thou be the Son of God, save us"—but "Because thou art God, deliver me from the judgment to come" (Eusebius, Homil. *de Latrone beato*).

"My Lord and my God, deign to remember me!" And this man passes from faith to vision; wrapped in the splendors of grace, he understands the whole economy of the divine life and death; he understands that a God hangs between them, a God is con-

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demned who is guiltless of evil; a God dies because He has assumed the sins of the world and become the great criminal of humanity.

But He is a King from on high as well ; hence He possesses a kingdom, a palace, and servitors. He returns to His realm above, taking with Him all who believe in Him. This poor, unlettered thief, guilty of crime and covered with ignominy, believes, hopes, and loves, he sees all his sins and ignominy heaped upon the suffering body of this Man-God. Unable to extend his bound arms, he offers his suffering soul, saying: "Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom."

And Jesus, bound also, Jesus, who can neither lift His head to give the kiss of peace nor His hand to bless and pardon, Jesus, who is, nevertheless, radiant with goodness and ineffable sweetness, answers: "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise."

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In paradise with God! Can you believe that, poor criminal? Between those men bound fast to their crosses, occurs the most stupendous act that has ever taken place. The repentant robber relapsed into silence, and Jesus also. But their hearts spoke to each other.

"The whole of salvation is comprised in this," says St. Ambrose (Serm. 50), "to recognize a God in a humiliated and dishonored man, to see through the weakness of the condemned, the glory of the eternal King."

And we Christians in our daily lives must not be scandalized by the hand that wounds; nay, more, we must kiss the hand that plunges the knife, forgive the friend that fails, and greater still, murmur not at God's silence and what may seem at times, to be His indulgence toward our enemies. Finally, everywhere and always we must be firm in faith, steadfast and ardent in love, patiently awaiting God's time, willing to say our Credo in the gloom of Calvary.

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This is the true secret of eternal salvation. Let the darkness descend, what care we? For henceforth a torch burns beside the great Victim. It is the luminous soul of the Good Thief, alight in his supreme agony with the radiance of divine goodness. He watches, he prays, he waits. With Christ in paradise! The thought suffices. Now, withdrawing into his obscurity and immobility, he can bear all things.

HOW good God is! Who can doubt, after this, that He is always ready to pardon, that nothing but our own wilfulness can cut us off from His inexhaustible mercy? Behold Golgotha, O my soul. It represents thy sins, their number and malice. And yet the past life of the thief is annihilated in an instant, sunk in those words, "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise." What matters yesterday, since today thou art in paradise? Could a soul ask more? Time is not wanting. A few seconds sufficed to save the thief on

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Calvary. Nor can the justice of God affright thee. Looking toward the cross I see only His mercy.

Oh! the tenderness, the grandeur, the sovereign pity of God! When I dwell upon this attribute, even the thought of my manifold sins can not fill me with terror—for were they a thousand times greater, have I not ever a safe refuge in the cross to which I have but to cling, to obtain pardon? I shall be on the cross when I die, and I shall know that I suffer justly for my sins.

Let us implore Jesus to look at us as He looked at the Good Thief. *Memento mei*; nay, Lord, less than a look will suffice; only remember me! Do I fear God's memory of me? But to fear is to outrage a God of mercy who not only pardons but forgets my sins, and in the same moment promises me paradise.

And purgatory? What of that? "With me in paradise," He says. And He can efface, remove every stain, if it so please Him. "Lamb of God, who

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taketh away the sins of the world!" If He takes away the sins of the world, are not mine among them? This thought will surely give me peace and confidence in my last moments.

But I suffer, and am constrained to suffer. Even so, "Jesus pardons more readily those who suffer in union with Him, and who make a willing sacrifice, even of pains they cannot escape" (Bossuet).

Cease these fears and doubts, my soul, proud even to the end. Does the beggar reason when he stretches forth his hand to ask an alms? Extend yours—receive God's gift—be eternally grateful. There are even devout souls who trust in some secret strength of their own to meet God's justice. What folly! A web of gauze before a burning flame. Far better to depend solely upon His pity and mercy, to go to God poor, naked, emptied, and stripped of everything, to have nothing, even after possessing all, with nothing to offer save our miseries and failings; to meet the redoubtable Judge whose

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gaze pierces the angels, and to stand before Him, undefended, our innocence stained, with no reparation to offer—this is truly an appalling thought, unless like the Good Thief, we can say, “Lord, remember me!” Our hope returns if we can feel and breathe the one prayer that saves: “In God’s mercy alone do I hope for salvation.” (Epitaph on an ancient tomb in the church of Saint-Remi, at Rheims.)

VII

His Tenderness Befriends Us All

IF credence can be given to the pious legend Jesus' whole life was re-enacted at the foot of the cross, in the touching and sorrowful memories of Mary, of Mary Magdalen, and even of the Good Thief.

The holy women who followed Him through Galilee and Judea, standing afar off in sight of the cross, went over in memory their first meeting with Christ, the familiar conversations in the gathering dusk under the spreading fig trees and sycamores, and across the rose-tinted laurel that bordered the enchanted shores of the Sea of Tiberias. It was there by preference that the Master preached His new and wondrous doctrine. All these scenes and images passing before them formed, as it were, a glorious aureole of love and

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yearning around the drawn face of the dying God.

And there were also women looking on afar off, among whom was that ambitious mother of the children of Zebedee, James and John (Mark 15:40). How well she remembered the day when, urged by a longing pardonable in a mother, she accosted Jesus on the highway.

“Master, I have a favor to ask. Master, since Thou art King, and shall reign in Thy realm, grant that my two sons, James and John, may be seated in Thy Kingdom, one at Thy right and the other at Thy left.”

“O woman! thou knowest not what thou art asking. My Kingdom! See its insignia: My throne, a cross; My crown, a circlet of thorns; the crown jewels, My blood, that flows to the last drop; My title, read it nailed in derision on high; those at My right and My left, two crucified men like Myself. No, in sooth, thou knowest not what thou dost ask! . . . James and John, can they drink of my chalice?”

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“Yea, Lord.”

“But this chalice is of myrrh and vinegar, of the tears that flow from my eyes, of the anger of the Father, the contempt of men, and the abandonment of my own. Can they drink of it? Ah! thou knowest not what thou dost ask!”

The Good Thief, far from demanding a high place, asked but to be remembered. “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled: and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matt. 23 : 12).

All these thoughts and far-off pictures were present to the mother of James and John as she perceived in the gloom, near the despised, outraged and dying Jesus, her son John—alone. And the other, James, where was he? He who had asked for a place near the King, and had affirmed that he could drink of the same chalice, had fled and was in hiding. John, the youngest, stood alone on the blood-stained summit.

JOHN, too, returned in thought to the first meeting with the Master. That whole past was lovingly engraved in his mind. The heart, when torn by sorrow, inclines to the memory of happier days, and in the presence of the Beloved One, now humiliated and despised, John still saw Him in all His former comeliness. He saw the Jordan where John the Baptist stood amid the swaying reeds and the hedges of tamarisk lining its banks. On the day of that first meeting, the Baptist stood alone on the verdant border that contrasted strikingly with the sandy and ravaged plains of Jericho. With him were two disciples, Andrew of Bethsaida and John, both sons of fishermen on the Lake of Genesareth. The time was four o'clock; the air was soft and balmy, and the sun was sinking in the direction of Jerusalem, behind the mountain. Suddenly a footfall sounded. John the Baptist turned, and there stood the Master, His white figure sharply outlined against the green of the foliage.

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"Behold the Lamb of God!" murmured the Baptist.

Andrew and John grasped instantly the meaning of the Precursor's words; and leaving him, they timidly followed after Jesus. Presently Jesus turned and looked at them.

"What seek ye?" He asked.

"Thy dwelling-place, Master."

"Come and see."

Whither did He take them? To what retreat? To Jericho? Or further on in the direction of the Dead Sea, or toward the Fountain of Eliseus? Tradition does not tell us. All we know is that they remained with Him until nightfall. We know also that the following day, Andrew met his brother, Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messias." Shortly afterward, the Gospel tells us, Jesus passed by the bark where James and John, with their father Zebedee, were mending nets (Matt. 4:21). A word fell from His lips in passing, "Come, follow me." It was done, and John

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had belonged henceforth, to the Master.

There, at the foot of the cross, he recalled that delicious capture, and the subsequent sweet intimacy with the Lord, even to the resting of his head upon the Saviour's bosom, face almost touching face. And now, what a change! Behold the same visage soiled and dishonored! He recalled its brilliancy as of the sun when the Master stood on Mount Thabor, with Moses and Elias beside Him in the places of the two thieves. He heard again that voice from heaven and saw Christ radiant, His garments dazzling as snow.

But, in the deepening gloom of the cross, John beheld only three agonizing criminals expiring on three crosses. The frightful contrast appalled him; he could neither understand, nor grasp the meaning, nor see the reason for such suffering.

Neither do we understand the mystical reasons for the sufferings that crush us. Only light from above, a super-rational enlightenment, can en-

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able us to comprehend. We must believe that whatever befalls us is just and good and for God's glory. This act of faith will brighten many gloomy hours and shine on the scattered ruins of our poor lives.

The heavens darkened into impenetrable night; and it was at this moment, amid the consternation produced by so strange a phenomenon, that Jesus called His Mother.

"Woman," he said,—using the word which, in the language of that country is a term of respect and affectionate veneration: "Woman, behold thy son!"

"He calls His Mother," says St. Ambrose. "His tender, filial love owes this last public testimony to such a mother."

How Mary's heart must have quivered. Her lips touched the limbs of her dear Son; she lifted her arms to Him, and, still higher, her soul.

"MOTHER!" That is the last call of the dying. Those who have assisted at

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death-beds in hospitals and on battle-fields know how often they have heard, in delirium and the throes of the last agony, that sweet word, like a piercing cry, "Mother!" Man appeals to the being he holds most dear on earth, when all else human seems crumbling and giving way. At such moments he turns instinctively to the one who never abandons, because her love has never failed. In the waning consciousness, her image alone survives. Mother—faithful, loving, conquers all obstacles, bridges all distances, to kiss for the last time the pallid brow, to moisten the parched lips of her dying child.

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us poor sinners, now, and at the hour of our death!"

This prayer, O Lord, was made for us: and in my last appeal to the tender heart of our good Mother on high, I hope to put all the tenderness and supplication of my heart.

"Woman, behold thy son," said Jesus, looking at John, as if He would say, "Here, Mother, is the child that

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will take my place." And turning His tear-dimmed eyes upon the disciple He loved, He murmured, "Behold thy Mother."

VIII

His Agony is Completed in Silence

FOR two hours, Jesus had hung in silence in the gathering darkness. Terror had seized upon those about that dying figure. His words were already taking root in souls near Him on Calvary. The pardon He had asked for the soldiers and His executioners was stirring the heart of the centurion, who would fall on his knees, proclaiming Him verily the Son of God. His syllables of mercy to the Penitent Thief had elevated and purified that dying prisoner, absorbed now in the contemplation of Christ's immense and divine pity. The words, "Woman, behold thy son; Son, behold thy Mother," sank sweetly, yet sorrowfully, into the hearts of Mary and her new child.

That Mother most compassionate turned toward John, as he turned

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toward her; in that reciprocal gaze, what respectful veneration on the part of the son; what tender yearning in the Mother's eyes! Mary, through divine grace working in her, understood the full meaning of the gift. In bestowing it, Jesus but did His duty as a son. He was dying; His Mother stood alone; could He leave her unprotected in her loneliness? During His public life He had had a care for her. The Gospels do not mention this, but there is a gospel of the heart, not written, but felt.

Jesus was going away; He must appoint some one to take His place. Had Peter been there, at the cross, who knows but that upon him, the future head of the Church, Vicar of Christ, would have descended the privilege of cherishing the sorrow-stricken Mother. But he was absent, and Jesus rewarded the fidelity of John.

WHEN God searches for souls to do His work, happy are those upon whom His glance then falls. Mary had be-

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come John's mother, and John must have from her all the tenderness which belonged to her Son. The Virgin Mother seized the full meaning of this universal motherhood. More had been given to her, and more was at once and forever demanded of her; she must respond to the appeal of her dying Son by loving, through this new child, all present and future generations; and her sorrowful maternity took life and form during those two hours of silence.

"Oh! my Jesus, what dost Thou require of me?" she asks mutely. "All men, even these?" She looks about her. Her eyes rest lovingly on John. But there are also the executioners, the soldiers, the mockers, the priests, the Pharisees. Must she take these to her heart? "Yes, sorrowing Mother." And the generations to come? "Yes, sorrowing Mother." Alas! like her Son, who, from the height of the cross, embraced all humanity in His divine glance, so Mary at the foot of that same cross, must extend the fulness of her motherhood to all future men.

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Thou wilt not recoil before this cruel task, O Mother! Come even to me, I beseech thee, that I may seek refuge in Thy maternal arms.

Mary accepted and her soul was pierced anew with the sword of sorrow prophesied by Simeon. Only then did she understand the full meaning of that prophecy (Luke 2:35). As her Son had extended His feet and hands to be nailed, so she bared her heart to the sword; and in that bleeding wound, during the silence and darkness at the foot of the cross, beneath the pardoned thief, and beside the weeping Magdalen, we too were born unto that divine and symbolic relationship of John and the Mother of Christ.

Jesus saw all from the height of His blood-stained throne, and as after the first days of creation, He could approve, for He "saw that it was good" (Gen. 2).

SINCE that hour on Calvary, when Mary brought forth in the pain and labor of her bleeding heart her spiritual offspring, she has had two distinct

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classes of children. First there are those of the race of John, pure and purified souls. For these she has ever the tenderness and caresses of a mother who sees in them the life of Jesus—grace. But how rare, O Mother, are these chosen souls! I see but one John on Calvary.

Then there is the race of the executioners. Who of us can say that he is not, or has never been of this race? He who sins, crucifies Christ anew! And beside the cross there stands a sorrowing Mother who loves us despite our cruel forgetfulness and ingratitude.

This is the great miracle of God, to have so drawn and united sinners to Him that they become Mary's children. Since that dark hour on Golgotha, Mary not only deigns to receive them, but she goes in quest of them. She restores them, and bids them take refuge in her open heart.

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen."

IX

Utter Dereliction

LIFE holds no crueller hour than that in which a man finds himself absolutely alone. Whether misfortune has stripped us of goods and friends, or old age has crept upon us, few escape the pangs of loneliness. The happiest lives drift, in the end, into indifference to men and things. What a contrast between the buoyancy, the eagerness and allurements of youth, and the desolation of the last years of life! Those we loved are gone, and other lives that touched our own are set in newer currents. No one remains to bestow love and friendship upon us, no one to whom we can give either. It is too late to form new ties that death must soon sever. So we finish our course like strangers in a foreign land. This is the final abandonment, the last stripping, the death-blow to

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that instinct which has so long clung to life, and all that men call happiness.

Jesus in His Passion entered into this desolate solitude, and there, as in all else, He did not spare Himself. He carried to its utmost conceivable expression, the despair and anguish of abandonment. In the space of twenty-four hours He fell from delirious triumph to contempt and desertion, stripped of honor and of friends; and the close of His life appeared as a catastrophe.

Now, on the cross, He was nearing the end of His three hours of agony. Enshrouded in darkness, His bleeding form was scarcely distinguishable upon its last bed, its last shelter. The cross was His only possession. Jesus was no longer on the earth, neither was He in heaven. Suspended by nails, He was held fast to a dying life by wounds that each moment were tearing wider asunder.

Hardly forty-eight hours before, if He had appeared in the streets of Jerusalem, He would have been ac-

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claimed by the populace; His disciples would have been proud of the Master who was hailed as King. But on that Friday, where were they? Who was left of the Twelve? One only stood at His side. The people had denied Him; the priests had delivered Him up; all had turned against Him; and to complete His utter dereliction, by His will, he yielded up His own beloved Mother. Nothing now remained to Him save His heavenly Father.

MAN, in the grip of an adverse fate, stripped of the goods of this world, deserted by friends, realizes that God is all in all. Then his cry of supplication penetrates heaven, and detached wholly as he is from men and things, the lustre of renouncement lights up his face with an expression of serene dignity and spiritual beauty.

Boniface VIII, that striking type of papal dignity, saw himself at eighty-four years of age abandoned by his cardinals and delivered over to his enemies. But his throne remained.

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Conscious of his exalted office, clothed in all the pomp of pontifical majesty, crowned with the papal tiara, cross in hand, he mounted his throne in the deserted hall. There, attended by a faithful cardinal and a monk, he appeared a kingly figure, great and supreme despite his pathetic and empty court; and as the doors gave way under the brutal and sacrilegious battering of the envoys of Philip of France, he exclaimed: "At least I die as befits the Vicar of Christ."

Both friend and foe bow before courage, pride, and dignity that die standing. When man is face to face with injustice and cowardice, it is the consciousness of his own integrity, it is his trust in an all-seeing God and in Justice incarnate, that strengthen and lift him to sublime heights of endurance.

All these feelings, a thousand times intensified, Jesus experienced in the course of His public life. How often He had called upon His heavenly Father and never in vain. But now in

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the supreme hour of His Passion, abandoned by all, delivered over to His executioners, with none to comfort or help Him, He turned in desperation to that far-off heaven where His voice had ever found an echo. In a last supreme effort, He lifted His head, heavy with the weight of thorns, and His eyes sought His Father on high.

But He too was silent. Deaf were His ears to the Son's pleading. His heart, open only yesterday to Christ's least desire, was now pitilessly closed to Him who had consented to be stained with our sins. Never again will any man taste abandonment so bitter. The darkness of our last hours will be illumined by a ray of celestial bounty. For He died for us. When all have fled and left us, when help fails, and there is no light for our feet, in the shadows that darken the last turn of the road, there shall shine for us as an effulgent sun, the glowing heart of the Father in heaven. No sinner, be he sunk in the depth of crime, ever called upon God in vain.

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But it was not thus on Golgotha. It was nearing three o'clock. For more than two hours Christ had hung in a silence as profound as the darkness that obscured His form. The repentant thief was silent; the bad one, scarcely able to mutter his blasphemies, so weakened was he by suffering and horror of the weird darkness that enveloped him. The people had gradually slunk away; even the Pharisees coming up on their mules to the foot of the cross to inspect the state of their victims, dared no longer mock openly. The soldiers spoke in hushed voices, and Mary, leaning on her new-found son, looked in agonized wonder at the closed eyes and mute lips of her dying Jesus. What oppressive silence! What heaviness weighed upon the darkened air! What terror wrapped itself about the three gibbets!

And Jesus, like a drowning man, sank deeper and deeper, until He appeared to be engulfed in the impenetrable gloom. For, lo, He sought therein, for God, His Father.

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“FATHER, hearken to my prayer, Thou who hast never failed me.” And while all was crumbling and giving way, Christ clung to Him to whom He looked for the help and consolation that men denied Him.

He waited; but God was silent; not even an angel came to strengthen Him, as on the yesterday in Gethsemani. The tide mounted; the waters of dereliction had submerged Jerusalem, and on Calvary, Mary Magdalen, John, and His Mother were immersed in the rising flood.

Opening His dimming human eyes, Jesus saw only blackness and horror. The dark tide was rising higher and higher; it had reached His sacred breast. Anon, those waters, freighted with the débris of sinful humanity, must beat upon His face.

Father! Father! turn not a deaf ear, I implore Thee! “I cry to thee and thou hearest me not; . . . Thou art changed to be cruel toward me, and in the hardness of thy hand thou art

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against me" (Job 30:20, 21). The tide rose higher and ever higher, and nailed fast, Jesus could not flee from the slow death that held Him in its grasp.

Had Christ been only human, to be rejected by all men, and abandoned by His own; to have heaven, His sole hope, closed against Him, would have cast Him into an abyss of despair. But He was God, and His divinity held in its mighty grasp His fainting humanity which suffered all the horror of the black tide that had reached His lips. From His divine throat, tightened and parched with terror, a sob escaped, and a cry rang out in the blackness: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

This piercing prayer echoed in the silent desolation of Calvary, the last cry of a man sinking beneath the waves.

God hearkened not to the call of His Son; nay, more, He rejected Him. His hand, far from reaching out to rescue Jesus from the angry flood, plunged Him deeper into its turmoil.

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Oh, God, Thou hast become so cruel to Thine only Son! But this is the hour of Eternal Justice, and the Prophets have conserved for us the anguished appeals that rose unceasingly to the closed heart of the pitiless Father:

“I weep, I cry out without hope—yet others Thou hast listened to. Formerly my father Abraham prayed to Thee, and Thou didst deliver to him five kings. Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and the Israelites in the desert,—Thou hast heard them all. But me Thou hast not heard. Is it because I have become a disfigured worm, writhing in suffering? Alas! I am no longer a man; I have become the shame of my people; they jeer and flaunt me. In this day of wrath, Thou hast abandoned me. Have I become contemptible in Thine eyes because I am plunged into inconceivable horror?

“In olden days Thou didst protect me. In my infancy an angel conducted me into Egypt; another brought me thence; a third ministered to me in the desert; yesterday in the garden one

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came to fortify me. But to-day, what have I? Furious wild beasts surround me. Men hound me as the huntsmen a hare. I am a tracked creature, caught and devoured by the pack, and Thou, my God, art silent. Behold! am I not an object of pity? *Father, save me from this hour!*

"I am helpless; I run like water; I melt like wax; I am broken into pieces; my joints no longer support me; my strength is dried up, and I can no longer cry to Thee!"

His head fell forward. His terrified eyes knew not where to rest. What appalling dereliction! Yet Christ must suffer it.

This mystery of divine despair is the violent conflict between two realities and possibilities. "I could have escaped this horrible torture," cries Jesus the man. "Now all hope has fled, and the worm that dieth not, consumes me."

"I could have evaded this cruel payment for sinners," says Jesus the God. "The choice was left to me; and I willed to cast myself into this fathom-

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less sea, from whose depths I can rise no more. I could have refused this cup, but I drank it, and the poison burns in my blood, and has permeated my being. The sins of humanity are nailed to my flesh, as my flesh is nailed to the cross. From the just anger of God I can not flee; I must suffer all, and unto the end." All this Christ could have said to Himself, and added that bitterest sting of despair: "Not only am I bereft of all human help, but I am judged unworthy of divine succor."

Abandoned by men, abandoned by God! To be rejected by God means to touch the deepest abyss of human misery and despair. The difference between the agony in the garden and the dereliction on the cross is, that in the first, Christ was not without hope; there was still one gleam in the darkness of His anguish: "Father, all things are possible to thee; let this chalice pass," and Jesus clung desperately to the one ray that forbade despair.

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Hope is the last light that is extinguished in the soul. But on the cross, no beam pierced the darkness; all chance of help had gone. The Father claimed payment of the bond, and the Son must suffer His chastisement.

“*I T behooved Christ to suffer.*” Poor Jesus, it is so because I have sinned—and my iniquities are upon Thee who must undergo the extreme punishment due to sin, the dereliction.

I have abandoned God—and Jesus, bearing on His body all my cowardly betrayals, suffered the frightful chastisement due me for all eternity. The dereliction: terrible retaliation: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

But this death is my salvation; and because of the abandonment in which this divine Sinner agonizes, covered with my sins, I shall be blessed and pardoned, and shall never taste the bitterness which He has drunk. His last satisfaction of divine justice was the supreme act of generosity. Love

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could go no further to expiate our sins and reassure our souls.

Lord, in Thy dereliction I touch the masterpiece of Thy immense goodness to me. Of all the sacred moments of Thy cruel agony, none is so precious to me as this dreadful hour. A God abandoned that I may never suffer such abandonment! This last proof of Thy love conquers fear. I believe, I feel, I see now that Thou dost desire and seek to save me. O divine, abandoned Saviour! In the desolation and loneliness of the last hour, it is Thee, my Redeemer, whom I shall invoke, and it is to Thee that I now offer in reparation the neglect and forgetfulness that wound my own heart. Amen.

X

Consummatum Est!

ST. MATTHEW tells us that from the moment of that first anguished cry of Jesus, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?", events followed in rapid succession. It was near the ninth hour; black night enshrouded Golgotha. Mary, John, and the holy women, their hearts torn by that piercing cry, drew nearer to the cross. All eyes were fixed on Christ, on the mutilated body of the Saviour. His face, in the words of the Prophets, was blotted out, livid, pinched, drowned in darkness and blood. His eyes were fixed and glassy. His mouth only they saw, from which the breath escaped laboriously.

It was the end; Jesus knew that He was dying. His mind, lucid to the last, reviewed the far-distant past and all that the Prophets had foretold of Him.

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No outrage had been spared Him, and He knew that all the predicted sufferings and tortures had been fulfilled on the road that led to Calvary and the cross.

Yes, all, save one thing, was now accomplished. David, speaking of Christ's intolerable sufferings, and the contempt to be heaped on Him, said: "And in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Ps. 68:22). One feature of human ingratitude, one last expression of cruelty would have been wanting, had Jesus, parched with thirst, in the supreme torture of the crucifixion, been given that drop of fresh water which is never refused a dying criminal. He made known His torturing thirst—but only to bring upon Himself another form of suffering.

When the nails were driven into His flesh, He gave no sound. He had not cried out at the crowning of thorns. The awful stretching that tore His limbs and dislocated His joints had not brought from Him a murmur of pain. Two cries alone on Calvary betrayed

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His torture: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and "I thirst."

Unspeakable were Christ's sufferings of mind and body. The exhausting sweat in Gethsemani, a night without sleep or rest, the brutal flagellation, and above all, the abandonment of the Father, whose implacable justice, a flame that burned more ardently in His being than the fever of the crucifixion, was as fire in His blood. All this produced the thirst that forced from Him that plaintive cry. The holy women heard. Mary looked about in vain, Magdalen, Mary Cleophas, John, all His devoted friends, gazed helplessly at those parched lips, for on Calvary they saw naught but rock, and the blood-soaked earth.

But the soldiers were not inattentive to the supplication of the dying Saviour. Beside them lay a bowl of vinegar used to sprinkle the swooning criminals when the first stroke of the hammer drove the nails into their flesh. Lying beside the bowl was a sponge to remove the blood from the hands and arms and

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to wipe the livid faces of the dying. It was soaked with blood, water, and dust. Who among the soldiers could have conceived the diabolical idea of quenching the thirst of the dying with this revolting draught? The sacred text leads us to believe that not one, but several, lent themselves to this last act of cruelty. One of them dipped the sponge in the vinegar; a second sought means of reaching the mouth of the thirsting Christ; while a third and more inventive one seized a reed and on it tied the sponge.

Nothing is unforeseen in the designs of God. Might this reed not have been one of those with which the soldiers struck Christ in the Pretorium? Who knows? Mayhap it was the very one He held in His sacred hand when they made sport of Him. The crown of thorns was worn by Christ in climbing Calvary; why not bring also the royal scepter, since the accoutrement must be complete?

The sponge soaked with vinegar was held to Jesus, who, moistening His

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parched lips with the acrid liquid, said, "It is consummated."

Yes, all was finished. The cycle of torture had been run; abandonment and dereliction could go no further. Night, black and terrifying, had descended; heaven had withdrawn its light; the body of the divine Victim was drained of its last drop of blood, and human malice had reached its height. Jesus had drunk the brimming cup to the lees, that bitter vinegar which a refined cruelty had kept for the end.

Death hovered over the cross, its hand was stretched forth, yet it was powerless to seize its Victim until He had spoken the word. "I alone," said Christ, "have power over my own life." Of it He was absolute master until this moment, and after. Jesus willed to die, of His own free will and to die grandly; never had He been more truly King than in the face of death.

LET us die with Him if He so wills it; let us die like Him, for the death of the just reproduces the death of Christ.

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To finish our earthly career on the cross in complete desolation, in silence and in darkness, and, should God ask it of us, with a drop of gall on our lips, is a death precious in God's sight.

What shall be my death? May it, Lord, be a silent and humble one. Let the follower of Christ bow his head, humiliate himself, clinging to hope in the shadow cast by God's loving hand, when He comes to lay it upon him; for in that last moment we may be denied all tenderness and affection from men and receive instead the bitter draught of gall and vinegar.

God is jealous of the image He imprints on the souls of His chosen ones. He asks from those He loves the desolation and pain He suffered. But it will be a sweet suffering, to gaze lovingly and with steadfast eyes on our crucified Redeemer, dying as He died, forgotten, abandoned, misunderstood, perhaps, even by our own.

This is the last purification. O death! desirable and precious in the sight of

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the angels, faithful model of the death of the gentle Jesus!

“My Lord and Master, from this moment I accept willingly from Thy hand whatever death it may please Thee to inflict upon me, with all its anguish, pains, and suffering.”¹

“**I**T is consummated.” These words which I myself must one day say, I say now with Thee, my God. Christ’s last words were said rather to the angels than to men, and to God, whose justice is now forever satisfied. The soldiers hardly heard them, so absorbed were they in their derisive jokes about Elias, who might come to deliver the King of the Jews. And then an immense cry rent the night, a cry that turned all eyes to the cross, where the expiring Victim lifted Himself on His wounds, as it were, defying death; and in the silence and terror that seized upon those on Calvary, a voice, full and

¹ (Prayer of Pius X, plenary indulgence, under usual conditions.)

THE ASCENT OF CALVARY

strong and triumphant, exclaimed:
“Father, into thy hands I commend my
spirit.”

Those conquering words pierced the heavens and shook the earth. John, standing near the cross, beheld the Master's livid face leaning forward. Then His chin fell upon His breast; Christ bowed His head and gave up the ghost.

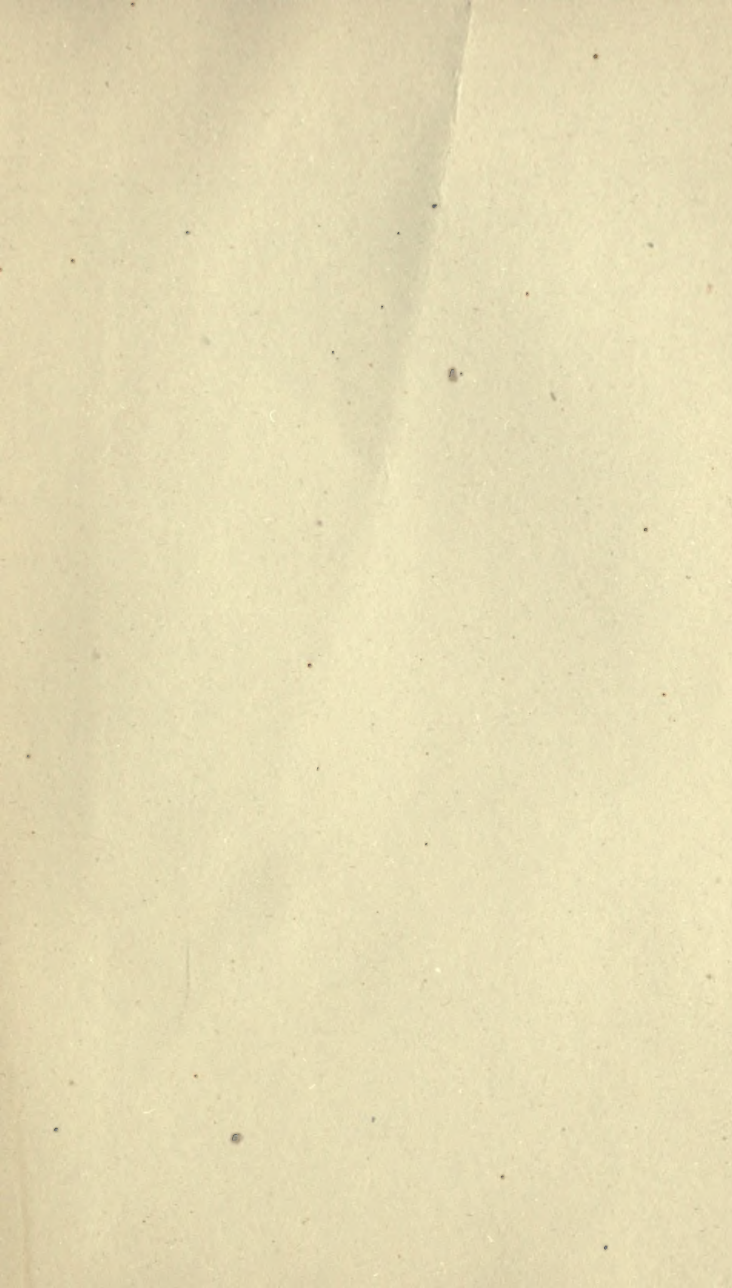
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Here finishes the ascent of Calvary. The great work of redemption has been accomplished. Christ has reconciled heaven and earth.

Christians of the world, approach this bloody summit with confidence for through it you can be saved if you will. Amen.







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